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GREAT POWER COMPETITION IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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GREAT POWER COMPETITION IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Michael McCaul (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman MCCAUL. The Committee on Foreign Affairs will come to order. First order of business is we have a few new members of the committee that I would like to announce and congratulate. First one, Representative Ryan Zinke. He is not here. Oh, well. That is one strike. Delegate James Moylan of Guam, congratulations, sir.

[Applause.]

Chairman MCCAUL. A guy that we have known for a while who has come back to Congress, Representative Mfume from Maryland. Is he here? Okay. That is two strikes.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine the Biden's administration policies toward the Western Hemisphere with a special focus on Great Power Competition. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MICHAEL McCAUL

As this committee continues to examine the growing malign influence of our adversaries around the world and the American response to it, it is essential that we assess the nature and extent of the risks that we are facing in our own hemisphere. Under the Biden administration, China, Russia, and Iran have bolstered their presence in the region. They have cornered critical mineral markets, expanded their military footprint, and deepened their intelligence capabilities, all aided and abetted by many authoritarian regimes in the Americas.

As we speak, four Russian warships, including a nuclear-powered submarine and a frigate carrying hypersonic missiles, are set to arrive in Cuba; China is bankrolling the dictatorship in Nicaragua; and Iran is looking to station Quds forces in Venezuela. China is infiltrating countries in Latin America and successfully pressuring nations that once recognized Taiwan, only to abandon their support.

CCP has invested billions in infrastructure and critical minerals throughout the hemisphere. For example, China maintains ports on both sides of the Panama Canal and is heavily invested in mining

operations in Latin America. Additionally, they have many more commercial officers than we do at their embassies working deals and have targeted PR campaigns that undermine American interests.

Congress has given the president tools to combat and compete with the great powers. It has authorized the DFC appropriated bilateral economic assistance and provided funding through the CHIPS Act, which I authored and passed into law, to secure our supply chains. It has mandated corruption sanctions against foreign officials and their family members; and, yet, the Biden administration has not effectively used all the tools that Congress has provided. The result is a hemisphere more and more aligned with our adversaries.

On illegal immigration, we are seeing the mass waves of illegal immigrants at our southern border and the flow of deadly drugs, like fentanyl, into our country. I have worked on border issues for 25 years both as a Federal prosecutor and as a deputy attorney general for the State of Texas and as a former chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, but I have never seen this border more broken.

We had addressed this problem with the migrant protection protocols, otherwise known as Remain in Mexico. But one of the first actions of this administration was to rescind it. One stroke of the pen wiped away 4 years of progress.

In fact, just yesterday, it was reported that eight foreign nationals from Tajikistan were arrested in America. They came across the southern border and were, quote, vetted and allowed to remain in the country. They are believed to have ties to ISIS-K.

Securing our border is a national security priority. That is why in January I went down to Mexico to talk to then candidate Claudia Sheinbaum about ways to work together on fentanyl and immigration. I congratulated her on her election. I hope she takes seriously the immigration issue and fentanyl.

Today is an opportunity, though, to evaluate the administration's work and assess the next steps. Our adversaries cannot be separated. They are all connected, and they are all working together. We can't win the game if we are not on the field competing.

I want to thank our three witnesses for being here today. And in the Great Power Competition in our hemisphere, I believe that America is falling behind. I want to be more optimistic and, hopefully, our witnesses today will give us better news than I have prognosticated; but that is the way I see it.

And with that, I recognize the ranking member.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GREGORY MEEKS

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me begin by thanking our three witnesses. Assistant Secretaries Nichols and Robinson and Acting Assistant Administrator Camilleri for joining us today. I know all of the work, especially of Assistant Secretary Nichols and Robinson, who I have worked with for a long period of time on the Western Hemisphere and know of your expertise, your dedication, and your focus, and I want to thank you for your service and everything that you do.

This is the first full committee hearing on the Western Hemisphere this year, and your insight today will be invaluable as work to address the many challenges we face with our closest neighbors. As the Biden administration made clear on its National Security Strategy, no region impacts the United States more directly than the Western Hemisphere. After all, this region includes the United States' top two trading partners, Mexico and Canada, as well as ten other U.S. Free Trade Agreement partners. And given how interconnected our economies and given our shared borders and our cultural ties, what impacts one nation impacts all nations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and shared challenges require collective efforts to deliver a better, more prosperous future. The required collaboration and dialog in finding common ground wherever possible to address issues like irregular migration, drug trafficking, violence, and the cascading effects of climate change. And I, for one, strongly believe that such efforts require strong U.S. leadership, which can only be accomplished by ensuring nations in our region see us as a reliable partner.

We risk eroding that trust, however, if we frame our interests in the region through the prism of a Great Power Competition, as today's hearing title has been framed. We must be clear that the United States recognizes investment and inclusive development in the region as mutually advantageous for us and our partners. Those investments must match our values, which is why the administration's approach combines a focus on labor and environmental standards, human rights, and inclusive growth. That is what sets the United States' approach apart from the People's Republic of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to exert greater control through predatory lending practices that leave countries indebted to Beijing.

This approach is also what allows us to be seen as a partner of choice to both out-compete the PRC and deliver better outcomes for our neighbors in this region. Initiatives like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which is working to mobilize $600 billion for quality and sustainable infrastructure development; the $3 billion identified by the Development Finance Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank for infrastructure in the Western Hemisphere; and the Central American Forward Initiative, which has catalyzed 4.2 billion in programming, along with friend-shoring efforts, are examples of this administration's efforts to increase investments and growth of our partnerships and with our partners in the region.

However, these investments are far from enough to serve as an alternative to the investments made by Beijing, and it is up to us in the U.S. Congress to do more. And while Democrats successfully negotiated to remove the steepest of cuts proposed by Republicans to our fiscal 2024 State and foreign operations budget, the final negotiated budget still included many cuts that hurt our diplomatic and development programs. For F2025, Republicans are again seeking to cut SFOPS, this time by 11 percent. This is not only irresponsible but also entirely contradictory to my Republican colleagues' claim objective to out-competing China. We are not going to win a so-called Great Power Competition on a small power budget.

Underscoring this point is yet another self-inflicted setback. Republicans have continued to hold up already-allocated funding, $94 million for the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti, a country further devolving into lawlessness as a result of horrific violence, including systemic sexual violence perpetrated by gangs. The MSS is key to promoting stability as Haitians work to restore democratic governance in their country, and this delay of funds risks preventing other nations from investing as they wait to see what we do. We must understand that Haiti's crises will be ours, too, when it spills over into the region at our border.

Twice now, Republicans have kowtowed to former President Donald Trump and torpedoed immigration reform bills that would have made the largest investments in decades to address irregular migration at our border. And the America First or America Only policy advocated by the former president has and will again isolate America and create a vacuum that our competitors will rush to fill. What is needed is continued U.S. leadership, as President Biden has demonstrated time and again, deepening our involvement in existing multilateral institutions in our hemisphere and working as partners to governments and the hemisphere to address our collective challenges.

We have already seen and seeing results of that engagement: Antigua, Barbuda, and 24 other states of the Organization of American States, joined together to condemn Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine this past February. Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic are among several Caribbean countries working to support clean energy project development and investment in broader climate goals through the administration's U.S.-Caribbean partnership to address the climate crisis.

And, finally, nearly 2 years ago, the Biden administration launched the Los Angeles Declaration of Migration and Protection with 20 leaders from across the Western Hemisphere to support integration, lawful immigration pathways to the U.S., and human immigration enforcement. Just last month, Colombia announced it would grant temporary protective status and employment authorization to 600,000 additional Venezuelans inside its country, adding to the 2.3 million Venezuelans already in Colombia. And I look forward to hearing more about that today.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, let's work together and let's lead in the Western Hemisphere. And I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. I appreciate the spirit and passion of my ranking member and good friend, and we will work together, as we always do. It is just too important not to, and this is probably the last bipartisan committee left on the Hill, to be honest with you.

Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. And we are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us. Ambassador Brian Nichols is Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the Department of State. Ambassador Todd Robinson is the Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, at the Department of State. And, finally, Mr. Michael Camilleri is the acting Assistant

Administrator, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean at the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Thank you for being here today. Your full statements will be made part of the record, and I now recognize Assistant Secretary Nichols for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN NICHOLS

Mr. NICHOLS. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Western Hemisphere has become a focal point in Great Power Competition again with the PRC and Russia vying for influence throughout the region. Addressing this challenge requires close coordination with interagency colleagues, international organizations, and our allies and partners around the world.

As Secretary Blinken has said, our strategic competition with the PRC represents one of the defining challenges of our time. We also remain vigilant as Russia seeks to expand its influence in the Western Hemisphere through malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, and security force projection. To manage these global challenges, we are bringing together a more integrated, inclusive, and competitive region underpinned by a network for partnerships that can shape the free, open, secure, and prosperous vision for the world.

Through revitalizing longstanding partnerships and institutions and building new fit-for-purpose coalitions, we are working side by side with our partners to address irregular migration, insecurity, the climate crisis, and inequality. Managing Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere requires strengthening democratic institutions, reducing corruption, helping our partners build economies that attract more investment from the U.S. businesses and trusted partners, and ensuring governments can be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their citizens.

Economic engagement with the Americas represents a critical pillar of our Great Power Competition strategy. The United States is the top trading partner for over two-thirds of the hemisphere's countries. We have invested over $1 trillion in the region. In 2022, U.S. goods traded within the hemisphere totaled to $1.9 trillion.

To unlock the region's economic potential and ensure democracies deliver the prosperity their citizens demand, last year, President Biden, together with 11 partners across the Americas, launched the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity. The partnership represents 90 percent of the Western Hemisphere's GDP and nearly two-thirds of its people. The initiative's goal is to make the Americas the most economically competitive region in the world.

As part of the partnership, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank convened a conversation on attracting the billions of dollars needed to build out the semiconductor and other supply chains.

I strongly support a capital increase for. The President's budget for Fiscal Year 2025, the Administration has requested authorization for the United States' full subscription and appropriation of $75 million as the first payment. A reinforced IDB Invest will deliver on key U.S. objectives for the region of bolstering private sector-led growth, building resilient supply chains, creating economic

opportunity for migrant populations, and offering a transparent and accountable alternative to PRC bilateral lending in the region.

As we pursue a strategy of invest, align, and compete with the PRC and the Americas, we are also actively working to address Russia's destabilizing presence. Moscow seeks to expand its influence of the region through malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, security force projection, which is why the United States sanctioned the Russian Interior Ministry's training center in Nicaragua on May 15th. Russia's training enabled the Nicaraguan regime's brutal repression against its own people.

Russia will conduct heightened naval and air activity in our hemisphere. Russia will temporarily combat naval vessels to the region. These ships will conduct port calls in Cuba and possibly Venezuela. There may also be some aircraft deployments in the region. These actions will culminate in a global Russian naval exercise this fall.

In Cuba, we remain concerned about Kremlin and PRC attempts to shape the nature of Cuba's future. Greater U.S. support for Cuba's private sector remains vital to counter Russia and the PRC's malign influence in Cuba. Promotion of private enterprise is just one of U.S. engagements in Cuba. We consistently advocate for respect for Cubans' fundamental freedoms and press for the release of political prisoners.

We have supported Haiti's call for safety and security and pledged $300 million to support the Multinational Security Mission. We have rallied more than 20 nations to pledge some $100 million in additional financial contributions, as well as personnel.

The restoration of democracy in Venezuela also remains at the center of our efforts. We continue to harness all diplomatic tools and leverage sanctions to this end, including with Venezuelans and regional and international partners to encourage Maduro and his representatives to hold competitive and inclusive elections.

Finally, we are leveraging partnerships to address irregular migration. Under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, which 22 countries in the region have endorsed, we have reaffirmed our shared responsibility to respond to migration and displacement across the hemisphere. This means reinforcing our own borders, opening new lawful pathways, and encouraging our partners in the region to do the same.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.

[The Statement of Mr. Nichols follows:]

Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
Brian A. Nichols
Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Committee,
Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere
June 12, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Western Hemisphere has become a focal point in great power competition again, with the PRC and Russia vying for influence throughout the region. Addressing this challenge requires close coordination with interagency colleagues, international organizations, and our allies and partners around the world.

As Secretary Blinken has said, our strategic competition with the PRC represents one of the defining challenges of our time. We also remain vigilant as Russia seeks to expand its influence in the Western Hemisphere through malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, and security force projection.

To manage these global challenges, we are bringing together a more integrated, inclusive, and competitive region underpinned by a network of partnerships that can shape the free, open, secure, and prosperous vision for the world.

Through revitalizing long-standing partnerships and institutions and building new, fit-for-purpose coalitions, we are working side-by-side with our partners to address irregular migration, insecurity, the climate crisis, and inequality.

Managing great power competition in the Western Hemisphere requires strengthening democratic institutions, reducing corruption, helping

our partners build economies that attract more investment from U.S. businesses and trusted partners, and ensuring governments can be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their citizens.

Economic engagement with the Americas represents a critical pillar of our great power competition strategy. The United States is the top trading partner for over two-thirds of the hemisphere's countries; we are the top source of foreign direct investment, having invested over one trillion dollars in the region. In 2022, U.S. goods traded within the Western Hemisphere totaled $1.9 trillion.

To unlock the region's economic potential and ensure democracies deliver the prosperity their citizens demand, last year President Biden, together with 11 partners across the Americas, launched the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

The Partnership represents 90 percent of the Western Hemisphere's GDP, and nearly two-thirds of its people. The initiative's goal is to make the Americas the most economically competitive region in the world.

As part of the Partnership, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank launched an investment platform that has already identified $3 billion in potential infrastructure projects across our hemisphere. By deepening our collaboration with the largest regional development bank in Latin America and the Caribbean, we are ensuring a greater share of the region's infrastructure is developed with high standards.

We work together under the Partnership to reinvigorate our region's economies, build resilient supply chains, and invest in our workers, our infrastructure, and our strategic industries, including clean energy, critical minerals, and semiconductors.

Last year, Intel announced plans to invest $1.2 billion to expand its semiconductor operations in Costa Rica. In April, Panama employed the

International Technology Security and Innovation Fund to sign a semiconductor research and development agreement with Arizona State University.

The United States also organized the first Americas Partnership Semiconductor Workforce Symposium and in April, Secretary Yellen and the President of the Inter-American Development Bank discussed the preliminary results of work to identify gaps and opportunities to attract the billions of dollars needed to build out semiconductor and other supply chains. These all represent concrete progress.

I strongly support a capital increase for IDB Invest. In the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, the Administration has requested authorization for the United States' full subscription and appropriation of $75 million as a first payment.

Our partners unanimously approved the $3.5 billion capital increase for IDB Invest at the IDB Group Annual Meetings in March 2024, in part due to strong U.S. leadership for this initiative.

A reinforced IDB Invest will deliver on key U.S. objectives for the region of bolstering private sector-led growth, building resilient supply chains, creating economic opportunity for migrant populations, and offering a transparent and accountable alternative to PRC bilateral lending in the region.

Furthermore, if the United States does not participate in the capital increase, we risk diminishing U.S. shareholding and voting power at the IDB – an outcome that could be exploited by China, among others, to grow their influence at the premier development bank in Latin America and Caribbean.

As we pursue a strategy of invest, align, and compete with the PRC in the Americas, we are also actively working to address Russia's destabilizing presence.

Moscow seeks to expand its influence in the region through malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, and security force projection, which is why the United States sanctioned the Russian Interior Ministry's Training Center in Nicaragua on May 15. Russia's training enabled the Nicaraguan regime's brutal repression against its own people.

Russia will conduct heightened naval and air activity in our hemisphere. Russia will temporarily send combat naval vessels to the region. These ships will likely conduct port calls in Cuba and possibly Venezuela. There may also be some aircraft deployments or flights in the region. These actions will culminate in a global Russian naval exercise this fall.

In Cuba, we remain concerned about Kremlin and PRC attempts to shape the nature of Cuba's future. Greater U.S. support for Cuba's private sector remains vital to counter Russia and the PRC's malign influence in Cuba. Promotion of private enterprise is just one part of U.S. engagement in Cuba – we consistently advocate for respect for Cubans' fundamental freedoms and press for the release of political prisoners.

As we grapple with strategic competition, we also confront several multi-dimensional challenges, including helping Haiti restore security and democracy.

We have supported Haiti's call for safety and security and publicly committed $300 million to support the Multinational Security Mission. We rallied more than 20 nations to pledge some $100 million in additional financial contributions as well as personnel. One vital method to support the Haitian people and improve prospects for long-term stability is by

reauthorizing the Haiti HOPE/HOPE II/HELP acts and the trade preferences they grant to Haiti's apparel sector as early as possible.

The restoration of democracy in Venezuela also remains at the center of our efforts. We continue to harness all diplomatic tools, including working with Venezuelans and regional and international partners to encourage Maduro and his representatives to hold competitive and inclusive elections.

Finally, we are leveraging partnerships to address irregular migration. Under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection – which 22 countries in the region have endorsed – we are working together with our partners to respond to migration and displacement across the region. This means a more coordinated approach to enforce our respective borders and cracking down on smugglers, combined with the opening of new lawful pathways to the U.S. and partner countries, with the goal of reducing irregular migration across the region.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, sir. And I appreciate your efforts on supply chain on semiconductor chips into this hemisphere and out of—I just recently came back from Taiwan, which is very much in the bullseye of the PRC.

I now recognize Ambassador Robinson for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. TODD ROBINSON

Mr. ROBINSON. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss State's engagement in the Western Hemisphere in this moment of Great Power Competition.

In this hemisphere, we are faced with interrelated challenges, corruption and security, mis-and disinformation, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. Particularly, the PRC and Russia seek to capitalize on these factors to increase their competitive presence in the hemisphere to compete against the United States.

In response, INL works with partners in the region to promote rules-based international policies and standards. The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Non-State transnational criminal organizations exploit weak rule of law, utilizing global networks and technology to diversify and grow their criminal activity.

Countering the flow of illicit synthetic drugs by TCOs and the precursor chemicals used to produce them is an administration priority. Combating the production and trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs is critical to safeguard American lives and deprive TCOs of their profits. Synthetic opioids alone took the lives of more than 70,000 Americans in 2023.

By depriving TCOs of their ability to operate and expanding access to lifesaving treatment and overdose reversal mediation, we can reverse this trend. Through training, equipment, and technical assistance, along with bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, INL is working to counter the flow of illicit drugs into the United States by building our partners' capacity to disrupt the ability of TCOs to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Enduring security cooperation with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis and criminal networks that profit. And throughout Central America, INL supports specialized units and efforts to strengthen interdiction capacity, including by fostering interagency coordination through technical assistance, training, and mentoring, and providing critical equipment.

Through the global coalition to address synthetic drug threats, the United States leads the global response to the public health and security threats posted by synthetic drugs with 29 of the 156 participating countries from the Western Hemisphere alone. While we direct our focus toward fentanyl, we do not ignore other counter-narcotics challenges driving increased violence and instability in the hemisphere, primarily, those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Our approach has evolved to address the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking.

Transnational organized crime remains a top concern for partner governments in the hemisphere and poses national security threats to the United States. TCOs are utilizing global networks and technology to diversify and expand activities, and there is demand for their services, especially from our global competitors.

INL works tirelessly to bolster the rule of law and judicial capacities of our partners throughout the Western Hemisphere, as they often serve as the critical defenders of democracy and against malign actors. We combat endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption. Corruption provides a foothold for the influence of malign actors and our adversaries weaponize corruption to drive a wedge between us and our partners. Corruption in the Western Hemisphere is a roadblock to the equitable society and economic development and a key national security threat.

Throughout sector programming with judges, police, and prosecutors, through this, INL supports Western Hemisphere partners to protect and serve communities through the delivery of impartial and equitable administration of law. INL also focuses on reform of judicial institutions and supports regional partners to implement obligations under international standards, benchmarks, and treaties. Finally, INL promotes anti-corruption priorities in the Western Hemisphere through multilateral engagement.

Transnational criminal organizations and corruption in the Western Hemisphere are deeply rooted challenges that embolden and empower our global competitors. To out-compete these actors and counter their detrimental impact on citizen security, economic prosperity, and democracy in our region, we must continue to support our partners where possible and pursue innovative solutions. While these issues pose a serious threat to regional stability and our own national security, INL is and will continue to be committed to advancing a just and secure future in our hemisphere.

Thank you for your attention on this important issue, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The Statement of Mr. Robinson follows:]

Statement of Todd D. Robinson
Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics
and Law Enforcement Affairs before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Hearing on Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere
Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Department of State's engagement in this moment of great power competition. This includes our efforts in the Western Hemisphere to respond to global issues that no one country can address alone, such as corruption, transnational criminal networks, and drug trafficking, especially to keep illicit synthetic drugs out of the United States. Together with our interagency colleagues, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) works to combat international crime across the region by bolstering the rule of law, uprooting corruption, strengthening the capacity to confront transnational criminal organizations, and deterring the production and trafficking of illicit drugs and firearms, all in a concerted and whole of government approach to outcompete our strategic rivals.

Understanding the Threat Posed by Competitors

In this hemisphere, we are faced with inter-related challenges, that inhibit economic and investment opportunities and enable illegal activities to thrive. Criminal misuse of emerging information and communications technologies, like encrypted messaging applications or new financial tools like cryptocurrencies create new challenges for investigators, prosecutors, and judges.

The malign influence exerted by our competitors enables transnational crime, breeds corruption, and weakens democracy and the rule of law throughout the region. Malign actors and competitors seek to

exploit this vicious cycle to further entrench their illicit and dangerous activities across the region.

Countering PRC Influence in the Western Hemisphere

Corruption, insecurity, mis- and disinformation, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. This has enabled external actors with undemocratic interests and values to exploit these challenges for greater influence and acceptance. Particularly, the PRC and Russia seek to capitalize on these factors to increase their competitive presence in the hemisphere to compete against the United States. In response, INL works with partners in the region, including UN agencies such as UNODC and EU partners, to promote rules-based international policies and standards. This includes support to partner nations in the implementation of reforms in alignment with the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) through UNODC's Anti-Corruption Hubs project. The Hubs project works within regions and countries on specialized implementation of UNCAC to strengthen regulatory reforms, civil society, and governments against corrupt practices. Through this project, partners are made aware of the risks to partnering with the PRC and Russia and recognize good partners such as the United States as the partner of choice. INL is also the leading donor to the OAS's anti-corruption peer-review mechanism, which assesses almost every country in the region on their compliance with their anti-corruption treaty obligations under the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. These assessments have resulted in countless reforms strengthening anti-corruption frameworks.

The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Working with our like-minded partners in the region, in the interagency, and in Congress will help us ensure we are combating this constantly evolving challenge.

Deterring the Production and Trafficking of Illicit Drugs

Non-state transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) also exploit weak rule of law, utilizing global networks and technology to diversify and grow their criminal activity. Out-competing TCOs, particularly those that produce, traffic, and profit from illicit synthetic drugs, is our top priority. Combating the production and trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs is critical to safeguard American lives and deprive TCOs of their profits from this illicit and dangerous business. The scourge of synthetic opioids alone took the lives of more than 70,000 Americans in 2023. By depriving TCOs of their ability to operate and expanding access to lifesaving treatment and overdose reversal medication, we can reverse this trend – and we are starting to see progress. Provisional data from the CDC shows the curve of all overdose deaths is bending and declined over the past year – the first decline in more than five years. We are still losing more Americans to drugs than we should be, but these are encouraging trends.

Countering the flow of illicit synthetic drugs and the precursor chemicals used to produce them is a top priority of this Administration. The Department is leading a global response to this challenge, including partners from the Western Hemisphere, to further our objectives. INL continues to employ a comprehensive counternarcotics approach, aiming to dismantle criminal networks profiting not only from synthetic drugs but also from trafficking cocaine, other illicit contraband, and precursor chemicals – as well as promoting adoption of evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment, and other drug demand-related issues.

Through training, equipment, technical assistance, and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, INL works to counter the flow of illicit drugs into the United States by building our partners' capacity to disrupt the ability of TCOs to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Enduring security cooperation with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis and the criminal networks that

profit from it. To assist with preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals for fentanyl production, INL facilitates engagement with the private sector and works with security partners to improve border and maritime port security to disrupt the transport of illicit precursor chemicals by transnational criminal networks. The United States, Mexico, and Canada, under the auspices of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee (TFC), reviewed respective legal frameworks to identify gaps and recommendations for strengthening regulations. The TFC is exploring options to engage the private sector on voluntary standards to identify and report suspected diversion of licit precursor chemicals.

INL will capitalize on these initiatives and expand areas of cooperation with our Mexican counterparts, including working with Mexican regulators and public health agencies to tackle the challenge of illicit synthetic drugs from all angles. INL funds training for and has donated protective equipment to Mexican security and justice personnel to assist in identifying, safely dismantling, and investigating clandestine laboratories. INL has also provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. Since 2019, INL-donated canines have supported over 50 fentanyl seizures, and seized more than three million fentanyl pills, 240 kilograms of fentanyl powder, and 2,300 doses of liquid fentanyl.

Throughout Central America, INL supports specialized units and efforts to strengthen interdiction capacity, including by fostering interagency coordination through technical assistance, training and mentoring, and providing critical equipment. For example, the newly created, INL-supported, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-mentored and vetted unit in Costa Rica dismantled the first fentanyl trafficking ring identified in the country through a series of operations in November 2023.

In Argentina, one of the most forward-leaning partners on synthetic drugs in the hemisphere, INL-trained officials seized over 30 metric tons of precursor chemicals in 2023. Additionally, in June 2023, INL supported the

Argentine government in creating a code of conduct for its chemical industry to prevent the diversion of precursors to produce illicit drugs.

The United States also leads the global response to the public health and security threats posed by synthetic drugs. The Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, launched by Secretary Blinken in July 2023, convenes over 1,500 participants from 156 countries and 15 international organizations on this critical issue. Of those, 29 countries from the Western Hemisphere have been active participants, with Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago serving as Co-Chairs for the Coalition's Working and Sub-Working Groups. During monthly Sub-Working Group meetings, participants have identified challenges, shared best practices, and connected with international organizations on initiatives to prevent the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detect emerging threats, and promote public health interventions. INL also works closely with countries from the Western Hemisphere under the auspices of multilateral fora like the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States and the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs to drive regional and international cooperation to address synthetic drug threats.

While we direct our focus toward illicit fentanyl, we do not ignore the other counternarcotics challenges driving increased violence and instability in the hemisphere – primarily those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. INL's approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction but on addressing the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. These include promoting rural security, and justice; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes to deprive TCOs of their profits.

Ecuador is a significant transit country for cocaine en route to the United States and Europe that has suffered from increased violence,

including political assassinations. INL partners with key institutions to build the capacity and ability to cooperate across agencies to monitor and interdict maritime and land-based drug trafficking. For example, this February, I inaugurated a joint Navy and Police task force, GOMAR, that integrates intelligence and operations to effectively respond to organized crime on Ecuador's waterways.

Strengthening Capacity to Combat Transnational Organized Crime

Transnational organized crime remains a top concern for our partner governments in the Hemisphere and poses national security threats to the United States. Now more than ever, TCOs are utilizing global networks and technology in new ways to diversify and expand their activities. This so-called "criminal convergence" grows TCOs' profits and complicates efforts to disrupt criminal activity. INL, in support of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, works to build the capacity of law enforcement and justice sector authorities throughout the Western Hemisphere to investigate and prosecute criminal networks involved in drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling, financial crimes, cybercrime, and nature crimes such as wildlife trafficking, illegal mining, and illegal logging.

I want to thank many members of the committee who have engaged on these issues over the years. We know that TCOs are profit-seeking organizations and there is significant demand for their services, especially from our global competitors. We have seen protected areas across Venezuela, Guyana, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil destroyed by criminal syndicates seeking gold, timber, and wildlife products to meet the demand of buyers around the world. The PRC's unwillingness to clamp down on this illicit activity poses immense challenges for our partners in the region on top of the assistance we give them to face other criminal threats.

A key element of INL efforts is the U.S. Transnational and High-Tech Crime Global Law Enforcement Network – or GLEN – which places Department of Justice prosecutors around the world to strengthen

international cooperation in combating cybercrime and intellectual property crime. These twelve International Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property Advisors, or ICHIPs, provide specialized technical engagement to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of these borderless crimes. Notable successes have included helping coordinate the takedown of the Lockbit ransomware group earlier this year, providing legislative advice to enable the Budapest Cybercrime Convention to grow to its current 72 states parties, and continuing to expand new regional law enforcement cryptocurrency working groups. The GLEN is adapting to address not only the demand of developing countries for basic assistance, but the specialized training needed to combat cyber-enabled facets of modern transnational crime threats including online child sexual exploitation and abuse and online trafficking of narcotics, including fentanyl.

In Haiti, the Department remains acutely focused on the violence and instability stemming from criminal gangs, which undermine regional security through transnational criminal activities and drive undocumented migration to the United States. We are working to support the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti, or MSS, in close consultation with this committee and other Congressional partners. Bipartisan Congressional support is critical to enable this multinational security mission to strengthen the Haitian National Police, or HNP, to reestablish security in Haiti and build security conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections. We are providing essential subject matter expertise and funded Kenya's predeployment training and personnel costs for the initial contingent, which is expected to deploy soon. We are working to provide critical equipment for the MSS. As we work to support MSS deployment, INL continues its partnership with the HNP to build their capacity to counter gang violence. INL vets, trains, equips, mentors, and provides logistical support to specialized HNP units who bravely serve the people of Haiti.

INL's strategic programming under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) seeks to reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, bolster citizen security and the rule of

law, and promote regional cooperation. Recently, Trinidad and Tobago authorities brought charges against three members of a Caribbean arms trafficking ring who unlawfully exported firearms from Florida to Trinidad and Tobago. This conviction highlights the value of U.S. interagency cooperation with Caribbean partners to address the illicit outflow of firearms from the U.S. to the Caribbean, as exhibited in the regional CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit based in Trinidad and Tobago.

INL support has yielded successes throughout the region in the fight against money laundering and financial crimes. In Colombia, where authorities estimate $15 billion in illicit proceeds pass through the country annually, an INL-supported anti-money laundering task force closed 2023 with 24 arrests and 202 seized assets for the year. The multi-year bilateral effort received a boost after the Colombian National Police assigned it 20 investigators in 2023. In Panama, INL supports an FFBI- mentored Anti-Money Laundering/Anti-Corruption Task Force, which since its inception in May 2021 helped Panamanian authorities arrest over 140 suspects and helped Panama leave the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2023.

INL advances the fight against transnational organized crime in close collaboration with U.S. and local law enforcement agencies. In Guatemala, for example, INL partners with the DEA, FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, to train, mentor, and advise vetted units to pursue counternarcotics, anti-human trafficking and smuggling, and anti-gang investigations with a U.S. nexus. This interagency coordination helped the United States secure the extradition of a record number of defendants from Guatemala to the United States for prosecution of narcotics trafficking and human smuggling related offenses during 2020-2024. In Honduras, INL sponsors and supports the Gang Resistance Education and Training program (known as "GREAT"), which trains Honduran National Police officers to work with at-risk youth in resisting gang influence. Since 2012, INL has certified 111 GREAT instructors

currently on active duty and graduated more than 880,000 at risk youth from the program.

Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption

INL works tirelessly to bolster the rule of law and judicial capacities of our partners throughout the Western Hemisphere, as they often serve as the critical defenders of democracy and against malign actors. The U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption is a cornerstone of our foreign policy and a key part of INL's mission. In support of the strategy, INL delivers foreign assistance that prevents and addresses corruption; preserves, strengthens, and enforces the global anti-corruption architecture, including treaty obligations and international standards; and promotes accountability through sanctions and visa restriction authorities. In 2023, the Department issued public visa restrictions on more than 90 individuals for their involvement in significant corruption from all over the world. These designations have continued to prompt local investigations and create space for anti-corruption reformers to pursue accountability.

As a top priority, INL works to combat endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption. We have seen the consequences when endemic corruption and impunity are allowed to run rampant, like what we have witnessed in Venezuela: organized crime grows stronger, public infrastructure and services crumble, and the country becomes inhospitable for the much of the population.

Further, corruption provides a foothold for the influence of malign actors. In strengthening our partnerships with our neighbors in the hemisphere, it is essential that we address how our adversaries weaponize corruption to drive a wedge between us. Corruption in the Western Hemisphere is not only a roadblock to equitable social and economic development, but also a key national security threat.

INL works diligently through programming with justice sector partners, including judges, police, and prosecutors, among others to aid our Western Hemisphere neighbors in protecting and serving their communities through the delivery of impartial and equitable administration of the law.

For example, INL's Transnational Anticorruption Partnership (TAP) program, implemented with the FBI's International Corruption Unit, has assisted counterparts with opening and effectively investigating transnational corruption and money laundering cases in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, among others. By building partners' capacity to collaborate with U.S. law enforcement, this program has facilitated coordination between regional partners and the United States on more than 30 new investigations with a nexus to the United States. This program has also demonstrably improved the number, efficiency, and effectiveness of corruption-related investigations and partners' use of human intelligence and sophisticated investigative techniques.

Through INL-funded programs like the Department of Justice's Judicial Studies Institute (JSI) in Puerto Rico, INL supports the professionalization of judiciaries throughout the hemisphere. JSI Alumni bring these lessons to the courtroom, exemplified by a Salvadoran alumna who used her training to convict fourteen members of a violent criminal organization, leading to its disbandment.

INL programming goes beyond solely supporting judges themselves and also works to reform the judicial institutions in which they serve. With technical assistance and advocacy from INL, Ecuador launched a specialized court with national jurisdiction over drug trafficking, corruption, crimes against humanity, human trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, fraud, money laundering, and TCO cases. In the year and a half since the court's inauguration, it successfully convicted 165 individuals in 59 cases, including members of high-profile TCOs such as Tren de Aragua and Los Choneros.

Similarly, INL is supporting partners in the region to implement their obligations under international standards, benchmarks, and treaties such as the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, and Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD's) Anti-Bribery Convention. Through a partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and regional hubs based in Mexico City and Bogota, INL supports nearly two dozen countries in bringing regional experts together to develop regional anti-corruption roadmaps and operationalize targeted reforms through technical assistance. INL's ongoing support to the OECD's Latin America and Caribbean Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Network strengthens cooperation amongst law enforcement agencies throughout the region and bolsters compliance with the OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention and other treaties and integrity standards.

An additional way INL promotes anti-corruption priorities in the Western Hemisphere is through multilateral engagement. This engagement works to support, encourage, and where necessary, pressure, other countries into adopting and revising anti-corruption laws, improving policies and practices, setting up or reforming institutions, and ensuring authorities are better able to cope with corruption at all levels than ever before. For example, INL leads U.S. participation in the OAS' anti-corruption peer review mechanism, known by the acronym MESICIC (MESSY-SEEK). Here, member states evaluate one another in their compliance with their regional anti-corruption treaty obligations. This is a great tool to ensure countries across the hemisphere are taking positive steps to improve their domestic anti-corruption frameworks. Of the more than 650 total recommendations reviewed since 2015, MESICIC experts found that 67 percent of them were satisfactorily addressed.

The rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean is under threat. INL has demonstrated the ability to rapidly respond to rule of law challenges as they arise and engage when opportunities to collaborate emerge. In Guatemala, we welcome the initial steps and clear political will

demonstrated by President Arevalo to make rooting out corruption a top priority of his administration. That is why the White House announced the *Guatemala se Transforma* initiative, through which INL will make an initial investment of $50 million in programming to support the Arevalo administration's efforts to bring about transformational change to Guatemala's security and justice sector institutions. During the High-Level Economic Dialogue in Guatemala earlier this year, our delegations discussed the importance of good governance and combating corruption to create conditions for investment, job creation, and inclusive economic growth for the Guatemalan people.

In addition to our work with government partners, INL works increasingly with interagency partners to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening communities throughout the hemisphere.

In Colombia, for example, INL has joined forces with the government and civil society to increase the focus on preventing and mitigating corruption. INL also partnered with Transparency International to host a large-scale conference on best practices in government procurements, whistleblower protection, and training.

Across the Western Hemisphere, INL has supported the Pan American Development Foundation to empower civil society organizations to vet judicial nominees and provide flexible, on-demand capacity building to public sector officials. The project exposed TCO-connections among several high-profile judicial candidates, resulting in the revocation of their nominations.

Conclusion

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, transnational criminal organizations and corruption in the Western Hemisphere are deeply rooted

challenges that embolden and empower our global competitors. To outcompete these actors and counter their detrimental impact on citizen security, economic prosperity, and democracy in our region, we must continue to support our partners wherever possible and pursue innovative solutions through civil society in less receptive environments. While these issues pose a serious threat to regional stability and our own national security, INL is and will continue to be committed to advancing a just and secure future in our hemisphere.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and for your attention and leadership on these issues. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, Ambassador. I now recognize Mr. Camilleri for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL CAMILLERI

Mr. CAMILLERI. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss USAID's approach in Latin America and the Caribbean, which reflects the region's pressing needs and the reality that the choices we make there make a direct impact here at home.

USAID is responding to the region's emergencies, political challenges, and opportunities, and historic levels of migration in a way that enhances hemispheric stability and builds local capacity to address challenges. That not only helps advance our foreign policy priorities but provides a clear contrast to the approach of the PRC. Our stance, as a rules-based partner, not a transactional lender, gives us a competitive advantage and our partners the ability to make choices free from coercion.

While net approval for PRC leadership has declined by more than 25 percentage points over the last two decades, the U.S. continues to be the preferred partner to address national and hemispheric challenges. That includes showing up in moments of need, including responding to recent floods in Brazil and fires in Chile and Colombia. Last year, USAID provided more than $527 million in emergency response to the region, including food assistance and support for subsistence farmers in Central America affected by El Niño, and food, water sanitation, hygiene, and health assistance for people affected by the political and economic crises in Venezuela and Haiti. So far this year, USAID has provided $105 million for the humanitarian response in Haiti, helping our partners provide life-saving assistance to more than 1.5 million people.

While we work to address the immediate and urgent in Haiti, USAID also continues to invest in the long term by operating the majority of our programs. We are improving food security and have helped 105,000 farmers increase product yields. We are meeting health needs by operating 92 percent of our 170 USAID-supported clinics, despite gang violence. And we are addressing citizen security with community-based programming. But one of the strongest signals of long-term support the United States could send would be renewing HOPE-HELP trade preferences for Haiti's textile industry, a backbone of its economy.

Lasting progress requires development, security, and political stability. To that end, USAID has joined interagency efforts to build support for the MSS and is prepared to provide technical assistance to the Transitional Presidential Council in Haiti.

Our work in Haiti reflects our drive to advance democratic values across the Americas. The region is home to autocratic outliers, like Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela where USAID works to support people who demand democratic change and human rights. In countries where we see dangerous erosion by leaders consolidating power, we support civil society, independent media, and transparency. And we show the region that democracies deliver by capitalizing on bright spots and surging our efforts when citizens take a chance on reformers. That is what we are doing in the Dominican Republic, in Ecuador, and now in Guatemala, where USAID is

helping President Aĩe valo's team ensure that citizens who bet on democracy feel its dividends.

We have seen how non-democratic rule in one country can impact the entire hemisphere. 7.7 million people have fled Venezuela in search of freedom and opportunity. Nearly 85 percent of them have relocated within the region. So we have supported the generous regularization and integration policies of our partner countries, helping Colombia provide legal residency to two million migrants, supporting degree validation in Peru, and backing integration efforts in Brazil and Ecuador. These integration efforts deter onward migration while helping grow the host country's labor force, tax base, and economy.

We have also worked with the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to decrease irregular migration by nearly tripling access to H–2 visas. This helps American companies fill critical labor gaps and gives workers access to lawful, ethical employment opportunities that reduce the demand for irregular migration.

But treating the symptoms alone is not enough. Under the Biden administration's root causes strategy, USAID's programming is boosting sales and employment for small businesses, increasing farmer productivity and food security, improving education and vocational training, and supporting anti-corruption reformers. While we cannot claim direct causality, 2023 data shows a sustained double-digit decline in intentions to migrate from Guatemala and Honduras since the strategy launched in 2021.

USAID's work reflects our commitment to get the greatest possible return on our investments. Whether that means leveraging our programs to encourage effective policies, bringing in private sector and other partners who can take our dollars further, or using our programming to build the capacity of local partners so that they can sustain progress beyond our programs.

At this pivotal moment for our hemisphere, the administration's commitment to investing in people and partnerships across Latin America and the Caribbean positions USAID to improve lives and fortify democratic institutions, strengthening our standing in the region and our national security.

Thank you. And I look forward to your questions.

[The Statement of Mr. Camilleri follows:]

Written Testimony of
Michael Camilleri, Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
"Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere"
June 12, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you about USAID's approach in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Administration's policies reflect the region's pressing needs and the reality that the deep connections between the United States and our closest neighbors mean our choices there make a direct impact here at home.

USAID is realizing the President's vision by responding to the region's emergencies, political challenges and opportunities, and historic levels of migration in a way that reflects our values, enhances hemispheric stability, and builds local capacity to address challenges.

This approach not only advances our foreign policy priorities but provides a clear contrast to the approach of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and positions us as the partner of choice in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our stance as a rules-based partner – not a transactional, opaque lender – gives USAID a competitive advantage and our hemispheric neighbors the ability to make their own choices, free from coercion. Our long-term relationships with both the peoples and governments of the region have built trust. In contrast, net approval for PRC leadership has declined by more than 25 percentage points over the last two decades. Our partners know from experience that they can count on us to work with them to address national and regional challenges.

Emergency Response

That includes being there in their moments of greatest need. This year, we've already responded to emergencies in the region – providing relief supplies in response to the recent flooding in Southern Brazil and firefighting equipment and other humanitarian assistance in response to the wildfires in Chile and Colombia. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, USAID provided more than $527 million in emergency response across Latin America and the Caribbean. This includes market-based and in-kind assistance for food, water, sanitation and hygiene, health, protection, and nutrition needs for people affected by the political and economic crises in Venezuela and Haiti. In areas of Central America affected by last year's El Niño, USAID provided emergency food assistance and supported subsistence farmers to increase their ability to withstand future droughts. At the same time, we are seeing the benefits of investments in disaster risk reduction and preparedness that are now reducing the need for humanitarian assistance.

Haiti

In Haiti, a nation facing serious challenges, USAID is addressing urgent needs as well as supporting a path toward long-term stability.

Since the beginning of FY 2024, USAID has provided over $105 million in funding for the humanitarian response in Haiti. Non-governmental organizations and United Nations partners are providing more than 1.5 million people with lifesaving assistance and critical logistical support for the movement of humanitarian goods and supplies.

While we work to address immediate and urgent needs, USAID also continues to invest in the long-term socioeconomic wellbeing of the Haitian people. The majority of our programs are still running in Haiti, supporting lives and livelihoods.

We are improving food security by providing food to hundreds of thousands of Haitians a month and by helping 105,000 farmers adopt new technology and increase product yields by 50 to 200 percent in the past 10 years. We are meeting health needs with 92 percent of our 170 USAID-supported clinics still operating despite the gang violence that has afflicted the capital, and by strengthening public health infrastructure – providing one in two children with their immunizations and helping minimize the impacts of the latest cholera outbreak. And we are addressing citizen security with community-based programming that can meet acute needs today and build stronger communities moving forward.

But one of the strongest signals of economic support the United States could send to the Haitian and international community today would be immediately renewing HOPE/HELP trade preferences, giving the private sector the assurances they need to continue to invest in Haiti's textile industry, a backbone of its economy.

USAID recognizes that lasting progress requires not only development but also security and political stability. To that end, USAID has joined interagency efforts to build regional and global support for the Multinational Security Support Mission. We are also supporting efforts to lay the groundwork for the Haitian people to elect a representative government, including by providing more than 2 million people with the ID cards they will need to vote.

Supporting Democracy

Our work in Haiti reflects our drive to advance democratic values across the region.

The region is home to autocratic outliers like Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. USAID works in those countries to support people who, despite years of repression and highly dysfunctional governance, continue to mobilize to demand democratic change and respect for human rights.

Where we see dangerous erosion by leaders who are consolidating power and undermining checks and balances, we respond with support for civil society, independent media, and transparency. When comparing authoritarian societies and democracies it is democracies that experience lower rates of conflict, higher economic growth, stronger environmental protections, and longer life expectancies.

It is critical that we show the region that democracies can - and do - deliver by capitalizing on the bright spots in the region. We have to be able to surge our efforts when courageous citizens bid on reformers to bring them greater opportunity. That's what we've been doing in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

And it is what we are doing today in Guatemala, where USAID is providing a range of support to President Arévalo's team to advance their goals on economic opportunity, citizen security, and anti-corruption, helping ensure that when citizens bet on democracy, they feel the dividends in their everyday lives.

Migration

We have seen how non-democratic rule in one country can impact the entire hemisphere. Millions of people have fled Venezuela in search of freedom and economic opportunity, leading to historic levels of migration across the region.

There are now more than 7.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, nearly 85 percent of whom are relocating within the region. Accordingly, we have supported the bold, generous policies of our partner countries that allow migrants to regularize and integrate into their new host communities. USAID has helped Colombia provide legal residency to 2 million migrants. We are supporting one-stop-shops where they can access schools, health care, bank accounts, and jobs and rebuild their lives. In Peru, we have supported degree validation so migrants can work and contribute at their highest potential. We also have backed similar integration efforts in Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize.

This is a win-win approach. Integration not only deters onward migration but also has benefits for the host country. Benefits that include a larger and more skilled workforce, which helps grow the economy and create a larger tax base. For example, International Monetary Fund (IMF) research estimated that by promptly integrating migrants, host countries in the region could increase their respective GDP by as much as 4.5 percent between 2017 and 2030.

USAID has also worked to decrease irregular migration and strengthen worker protection by expanding access to lawful paths like H-2 visas for temporary and seasonal workers. In the northern Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras we have worked with our government counterparts to nearly triple H-2 visa issuances and decrease processing time. Visa issuance has risen from 9,800 in FY 2021 to over 28,000 in FY 2023. This is a mutually beneficial practice. It helps American companies fill critical labor gaps and gives workers access to lawful, ethical employment opportunities where they can gain skills and resources to reinvest in their home communities. Further, evidence shows these temporary work visas reduce demand for irregular migration; irregular migration rates in communities that received a high share of temporary work visas were around 11 percent, compared to nearly 30 percent in similar communities that did not.

Treating the symptoms alone is not enough. We must address the causes. Under the Administration's Root Causes Strategy for Migration, USAID's programming is boosting sales and employment for small businesses, increasing farmer productivity and food security, improving education and vocational training, and supporting anti-corruption reformers. While we cannot claim direct causality, there are encouraging signs that our efforts, in combination with other country and donor efforts, are making a difference. Data has shown a sustained, double-digit decline in intentions to migrate from Guatemala and Honduras since the Root Causes Strategy launched in 2021. Total numbers of encounters by U.S. Customs and Border Protection of northern Central Americans fell by nearly one-third in the same time frame.

Growing Our Return on Investment

USAID's work reflects our commitment to get the greatest possible return on our investments. Whether that means leveraging our programs to encourage effective policies, bringing in private sector and other partners who can help us take our dollars further, or using our programming to build the capacity of our local partners so they can sustain progress beyond our programs.

Conclusion

This is a pivotal moment for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Administration's priorities are helping USAID improve lives and strengthen government institutions. Outcomes that are good for the region, good for our standing in the region, and good for our national security.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, sir. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning. I have a map that I want to hopefully put up if our technology works here. And it is not good news. I mean, since this administration took power, we have lost our adversaries. Brazil, October 2022; Colombia, May 2022; Chile, December 2021; Honduras, November 2021. And if you look at the map, there aren't many friends down there. You have got Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and now with the recent election in Argentina.

We need moral clarity and authority in our hemisphere. When you lose that, you lose to your foreign adversaries, like China particularly. Illegal immigration gets worse, not better. Fentanyl is coming into this country. It's worse, not better. China's malign influence gets worse, not better. Cartels and their operations have gotten worse, not better. And it is all tied together. Our adversaries are all working against us. We don't choose them, they choose us. And we have this debate on Ukraine, but now we have it in our own backyard, in our hemisphere.

More countries recognize China than Taiwan in our hemisphere, and the Belt and Road projects keep coming and expanding. I think we need a new doctrine for our hemisphere, one that protects our interests, combats our enemies, and promotes shared prosperity between us and our allies. And I am not saying this to score political points. I just want to know what is the plan. That is reality. What is our plan to address these threats in our own backyard.

Mr. Secretary Nichols.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We work with countries across the political spectrum as long as they respect democracy, the right of voters to choose their own governments. The characterization that you make on some of the governments I would disagree with respectfully. In Chile, President Boric has repeatedly condemned human rights violations and the lack of democracy in Venezuela and continues to speak out boldly against the repression in Nicaragua.

Peru and President Boluarte and her government have been very supportive of our efforts to bring greater democracy to Venezuela to address the challenges in Nicaragua. They have raised deep concerns about the presence of Chinese investments in infrastructure, and I think we will probably talk about that today.

Chairman MCCAUL. Panama Canal is a good example. I mean, you know, Roosevelt created it, and then Jimmy Carter gave it back, and now you have two Chinese ports on both sides of the Panama Canal.

Mr. NICHOLS. Panama is a strong U.S. ally.

Chairman MCCAUL. And they are, and that is good. Right.

Mr. NICHOLS. We look forward to an excellent relationship with incoming President Jos? Raúl Mulino, and we think he will be an excellent partner. And he is already stressed in his conversations with our embassy his commitment to working with us.

Chairman MCCAUL. Mr. Meeks and I will be having a delegation to Latin America, and I look forward to working with you before we do that.

Ambassador Robinson, two points. I was in Mexico with the secretary of the Navy. We passed this year, there is new screening that can detect fentanyl and precursors technology. And I talked to

the secretary of the Navy down in Mexico. They are very interested in getting this technology deployed, especially to the two ports on the Pacific Side where all the precursors are coming in from China. Can you give me an update on that?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you for that question. We are working regularly with our Mexican counterparts, particularly the Navy, at the Port of Manzanillo and I can't remember the name of the other port. We regularly have contact with them. We regularly review the type of equipment and training they need, including canines, which have been——

Chairman MCCAUL. And that is great. I brought up canines with them. They said they would need, like, thousands of canines to do this. The technology is now available, and I think we need to get it to them, right?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, absolutely. What I would say, though, is, you know, unlike some of our competitors, we can't direct American companies to go to point X or point Y. They are going to go where they can make money. We can certainly expose them to our partners in Mexico and allow them to have conversations with the——

Chairman MCCAUL. Well, I talked to the secretary of the Navy in Mexico, and they are very interested. I think, if this is a matter of cost, they certainly would, I think, would want to buy it. But I think we could also assist them——

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely.

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. In that effort. And I would appreciate if you could update me on this because our appropriations process is going forward. I think that would be a really wise investment——

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely.

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. If we are going to protect our children from the scourge of fentanyl.

Last, Ambassador Robinson, you know, I talked to AMLO, the president of Mexico, and, you know, there is a choke point, and it is between, you know, Guatemala and Mexico. There is also the Darien Gap. It would make a lot of sense to me, and I have been doing this for a long time, this border stuff—I think Remain in Mexico is working, but your administration did away with that. But, you know, I think there is interest on Mexico's part. I think Panama has an interest in the Darien Gap to close this chokepoint off where you are not talking about 2,000 miles of border, you are talking about a very finite number of miles that we could secure to stop this illegal immigration that is happening, and then that sends a message of deterrence that the cartels understand.

I mean, do you have any thoughts on those two ideas?

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely. And I completely agree with you. In fact, we are working very closely on both sides of the Darien with Colombia and Panama, both getting them to work together and allowing us to assist them in monitoring the area, getting their forces to the area. Our INL airframes are assisting in getting their officers to the area. We would welcome Mexican support in this effort.

I think you are absolutely right that making sure that we are working with all of our partners in the region closely, and we are, can go a long way toward addressing this issue.

Chairman MCCAUL. I will look forward to working with you, and I am going to talk to our appropriators because we talk a lot about border security around here but, you know, when you have got two obvious, you know, sort of chokepoints, from a geographical standpoint, to me, it is just common sense.

Mr. ROBINSON. I would add Guatemala, as well.

Chairman MCCAUL. And Guatemala.

Mr. ROBINSON. In that group.

Chairman MCCAUL. Guatemala and Mexico and the Darien Gap. I think those two combined would make a whole lot of sense, and I think that would be bipartisan, you know. But I am not going to speak for Mr. Meeks. I will yield to him and recognize him.

Mr. MEEKS. I do think that could be bipartisan. But let me just say this: I just believe that we can't address our challenges if we just retreat behind our borders and, you know, we want to talk about out-competing China. We can't out-compete China or Russia or curb their influence throughout the hemisphere if we drastically cut U.S. diplomatic and development budgets. You know, there is a way why diplomacy is important and what we need to do with our investments, and that would also help with immigration, you know, illegal immigration coming across because people are leaving certain places looking for a better life because of what is taking place there. And the United States has to play a role in that, and we can't build the trust that we need to build and sustain partnerships with our partners and regions if the engagement is seen solely as guided by interests and competition with the PRC because it says that we don't really care about them, we are just caring about stopping the PRC.

And I have been engaged in the Western Hemisphere for most of my congressional career. And when I look at what is taking place down there, particularly when you look at places like Colombia and Brazil and Peru, when I look at some of the things that are taking place there in Central America, the Caribbean, there is issues of whether or not, because what I do see with those governments, with the exception recently of Venezuela primarily but in many of these other countries are democratically elected presidents that the people's voices are crying out for help in certain areas and are looking toward the United States to see where we are.

And I know that the president has certain policy priorities that he is putting forward so that we can try to address some of those issues in various parts. My first question would be then give us the strategic importance and what are the Biden administration's type policy priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean that addresses some of the concerns that I have just articulated and some of the concerns that we see in some of the countries that are our neighbors and our partners in Central America and South America and in the Caribbean.

Mr. NICHOLS. Maybe I will kick it off, Ranking Member Meeks. And thank you for your decades of leadership on these issues.

We are working as hard as we can to promote a more security democratic and prosperous region. That means delivering support for our allies when they need it. I will give you the example of Ecuador where President Noboa has faced tremendous economic, transnational crime, and security challenges. We have brought to

bear a full array of solutions there. My learned colleagues have traveled to Ecuador to support them on security and development issues. We are working through international financial institutions to provide relief to the crushing debt load that that country faces, and we seek to help them become more capable in dealing with the challenges that they face.

We need to see greater investment from U.S. and like-minded nation private-sector players in the region, even though we are the leading trading partner for two-thirds of the countries in our region. IDB Invest can be an important leverage in that effort.

I would also note doing things to help countries join the supply chain for electric vehicles and using critical minerals, which are abundant in our region, and making sure that U.S. companies have access to those, and work with partners so that everyone benefits along the supply chain. EXIM is a crucial partner for us in that regard. I think I mentioned already DFC. Those are all key tools that we have.

And we need to be present. We need our diplomats on the field, we need Ambassadors in every embassy, we need commercial officers, we need foreign agricultural service officers out there competing every single day because our competitors have their people on the field working——

Mr. MEEKS. Let me ask this real quick because there is two areas I want to deal, you know, I help, and I want to know how has the Bureau of Western Hemisphere empowered the Office of the Special Representative for—you know, one of the things that I have worked hard to get down was the racial equity and justice to advance the U.S.-Brazilian Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination, as well as we worked together to promote the U.S.-Colombian Action Plan for Racial and Ethnic Equality, CAPREE, and to address closing civic space for marginalized communities because, in a lot of these countries, these communities are marginalized, also across the hemisphere including Nicaragua and Venezuela and Honduras and Peru.

So tell me how is the Bureau is doing to advance that and working that, and can you do it without any money?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, it is a tremendous priority for me. Working with Desiree Cormier Smith in SREG has been incredibly important. We have traveled together to Brazil to hold meetings on our Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial Discrimination there. We have a comprehensive interagency approach on those issues in Brazil, and we look forward to receiving our Brazilian counterparts later this year to build on the conversations that we had both in Brazil and here in Washington earlier this spring.

Mr. MEEKS. Last thing. I know we got votes coming up, but Mr. McCaul and I are working closely together. I know he is going to have another meeting later this week because I am very concerned about what is taking place in Haiti and what that deal is and the money that is there. We are working very closely together. He has agreed that we are going to—but tell us where are we, you know, with reference to this new piece that we can get this thing done, and how important is getting that money that is needed for the security?

Mr. NICHOLS. It is vital, sir. We are making progress. On the political side in Haiti, we now have a new prime minister in Haiti. A new cabinet has just been gazetted. It is a group of technocratic experts. The Kenyan delegation has visited. They are ready to go. They need us to make sure that we have the things that they need in place.

The funding that we seek will allow us to provide crucial things like vehicles, fuel, ammunition, radios, other communication devices. This will be an important partnership with not just Kenya but a number of countries, Jamaica, Bahamas, others from around the region that will support this effort.

The Haitian National Police needs our help to be able to deal with the gang challenges. Every day, Haitians and others are at tremendous risk. We saw the tragic murders of two American missionaries last month, and we can't let more people die while we wait to deploy.

Chairman MCCAUL. And thank you for that. I had a briefing on Thursday. I just want to have assurances that the money and weapons will not end up in the wrong hands. We have a history of doing that as a Nation, and it is a legitimate concern. But I don't want a failed State in the region either that can be exploited by our adversaries.

So with that, I recognize Ms. Wagner.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to try to get this in before we run to votes. And thank you to all of our witnesses for their service and their time.

This administration's waffling has created chaos and instability on a massive scale, from Europe to the Middle East and beyond. We have got Russia, China, and Iran are taking advantage of our weakness and our lack of resolve. Every day, they are bringing the fight closer to our shores and whether through the utter collapse of security on the southern border or the out-of-control flow, as Mr. Meeks has brought up, of fentanyl into American communities. We must restore American leadership abroad to deter China and Russian aggression, but we cannot neglect the vigilant defense of our interests in our own backyards.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, this year, so far, 27,000 Chinese nationals have been apprehended at our southern border. A total of 89 of them have been removed from the U.S. in 2024. Last year, 24,000 Chinese migrants illegally entered the U.S. and only 285 were sent back.

Why are the deportation numbers so low, and what is your assessment of the national security risk posed by these growing and growing numbers of unvetted Chinese nationals illegally entering our country?

Mr. NICHOLS. The Biden administration is committed to secure borders.

Mrs. WAGNER. No, they are not. Ten million illegal migrants have come across, so don't say that to me. But go ahead.

Mr. NICHOLS. This administration proposed comprehensive migration reform that was not passed. The president has put forward new regulations that will expedite the removal of those persons found not to have the ability to——

Mrs. WAGNER. Tell me about the Chinese nationals. Fifty thousand in the last 2 years.

Mr. NICHOLS. We have worked with partners throughout the hemisphere as part of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection to impose new visa restrictions on a number of nationalities throughout the world who are entering the Americas. We have worked with partners to facilitate the repatriation of those persons who do not have——

Mrs. WAGNER. Why are Chinese nationals coming here?

Mr. NICHOLS. Maybe because China doesn't have much hope or prosperity for them. Maybe they are trying to leave——

Mrs. WAGNER. Well, that is not, it doesn't come under the definition of asylum, all right. Let me go move on. It is very disturbing, and do not at all tell me or this committee that this administration, this president has not let in over seven to eight million illegal migrants since he took office and millions more in got-aways.

Over 100,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2023, mostly due to fentanyl. And so far this fiscal year, over 9,600 pounds of fentanyl have been seized at the southern border, enough to kill around two billion people. In April, the Bipartisan Select Committee on CCP released a comprehensive and damning report finding that China directly subsidizes and incentivizes the manufacturing and trafficking of fentanyl materials and other synthetic narcotics.

Assistant Secretary Robinson, what is your assessment of China's role in the fentanyl crisis?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, ma'am, for that question. First, let me say that, since we have reinvigorated the Counter Narcotics Working Group, I have had four opportunities, two in Beijing, to speak to my PRC counterparts on this issue. They know that this is important to us, and they have taken some initial actions, notifying their chemical industry, for instance, about certain substances that should not be distributed to the United States.

But they also know directly from me and from the secretary that they are not doing enough. And——

Mrs. WAGNER. Yes. 9,600 pounds. I mean, that's, as I said, enough to kill two billion people. And the No. 1 killer of 18 to 34 year olds in the United States of America. This is a war on our youth. A hundred thousand Americans died in 2023.

I am going to move on here. Assistant Secretary Nichols, last year, Brazilian President Lula da Silva allowed two of Iran's most advanced warships to dock in Rio de Janeiro. The Lula government granted these ships access to one of Brazil's most important ports, despite U.S. sanctions and over the reported objections of the administration. What specific actions has the administration taken against the port in Rio de Janeiro where the ships docked and the Brazilian companies that provided them services or accepted payments and the foreign companies that have entangled themselves with the port or those Brazilian companies since?

Mr. NICHOLS. We have discussed with countries around the region the importance of respect for the sanctions against Iran and its forces. We have raised the issue with the government of Brazil.

Mrs. WAGNER. Two, two of Iran's most advanced warships docked there. What specific action did we take?

Mr. NICHOLS. We have raised this issue with Brazilian officials and expressed our concerns.

Mrs. WAGNER. All right. We have done nothing. I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Pathetic.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady yields back. The committee will recess for three votes on the House floor, and we will reconvene after these votes. Thank you so much.

[Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11:31 a.m.]

Mr. MAST. Committee will reconvene. The chair now recognizes Mr. Keating for 5 minutes.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses today.

Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela all support Russia's malign influence in Latin America. They also prop up, in doing so, Russia's war effort in Ukraine. Mexico and Brazil certainly could do more.

Given the fact that Russia now, their domestic product is less than $1.8 trillion, you know—compare that to California, it's about half of California's domestic product. We have advance in Russia economically, including Putin doing a whole new set of income taxes, steep income taxes, on his people, 5 percent corporation tax hike, new mineral extraction taxes. Their illegal war has resulted in cutting them off from supplying 25 percent of Europe's oil, 40 percent of their gas. They are certainly hurting economically.

Given that and looking at the long-range trajectory of their economy, given the fact that their security and military effort has been exposed, their weakness has been exposed by Ukraine, if you look at all those things, do you see in any way that these countries, looking forward, seeing Russia's obvious weakness militarily in Ukraine, seeing what they are doing economically, how poorly they are doing, that this alignment with Russia could be something that we could change, and could you comment on that? To me, those countries, in the short run, can certainly take advantage of the security issues, perhaps with the Wagner Group and other groups. But even mid-range, looking at a forecast, the trajectory of their alliance with Russia doesn't seem to be one that makes sense with their own self-interest.

Is there an opportunity there for the U.S. to try and come in and intervene? And what do you think those countries might be looking at looking at Russia today?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, sir. The opportunity for us is to present a positive vision for cooperation with partners across the hemisphere to demonstrate that working with the United States is in their interest, to show them that, if it's a matter of security cooperation, there is no nation that has more to bring to bear than the United States to support them. We look forward to working, for example, with Ecuador and Peru to help them transition to more U.S. equipment. We are very pleased that Argentina has bought 24 F–16s, increasing their interoperability with the United States.

But that is going to mean a presence and putting forward a positive vision and including through speedy delivery of foreign military sales and greater agility in our foreign military financing.

Mr. KEATING. Do you forecast or see them reevaluating the position, even absent the U.S. intervention? It is something I think is common sense.

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, the specific countries that you named, I think this will depend on progress toward democracy in those countries. The primary North Star for Ortega and Murillo, in Nicaragua or Maduro, in Venezuela is maintaining themselves in power and finding partners that will overlook their glaring abuses.

Mr. KEATING. And I think the other thing is China's activity economically, too. You see in African countries right now the remorse that so many of those countries have dealing with China's predatory loans and the promises. You know, countries that are doing business with them, they will take their raw materials. They will use it for their own business, and there will be slight profits to the country, the home country. That is opposed to a model with the U.S. and the West that would mean the investment would stay in that country and the profits would be greater in that country and the employment would be greater in that country than the Chinese model that is there.

So I hope, as we look at these countries, that there is an opportunity, in Mexico I hope there is an opportunity with the new president in terms of their support of the Ukraine. I hope all these things come to bear, but there is a great opportunity and I am glad we are having this hearing today to give us an opportunity to see what the Biden administration is doing and what opportunities are there for us to really have greater success right here in our own hemisphere.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Keating. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I want to go to you, Secretary Nichols. I have a very specific question. Obviously, the work that we do here does affect very specific companies, very specific countries, very specific individuals, and the question that I want to start with affects a company that is also located in my community. They are dealing with Mexico. President Lopez Obrador threatening to essentially take over their port, their land, in the Yucatan Peninsula. That's Vulcan Materials. Are you familiar with this as a situation?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes, I am.

Mr. MAST. You know, a little bit of overview on that. What could you say about that? What are you all doing to prevent this? What warning would you give this president on the way out as they are making this threat? What can you do about it? Happy to hear anything you have to say.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you. This has been an issue for quite some time, as you know. We have raised our concerns with the government of Mexico at multiple levels. We have——

Mr. MAST. Please don't gloss over those. Be specific about what those concerns are.

Mr. NICHOLS. The security and ability of investments under the framework of the USMCA is a matter of great interest to the United States. We have mechanisms to deal with dispute resolution under USMCA. We have met with the leadership of Vulcan multiple times to understand their concerns and their suggested way forward in this issue. Senior officials from multiple U.S. agencies

have raised this with their counterparts in Mexico, and we will continue——

Mr. MAST. What would be the Mexican counterparts?

Mr. NICHOLS. So the secretary of economy in Mexico, as well as their Navy secretary which controls the ports.

Mr. MAST. Conversations are fruitful or borne no fruit? What would you say?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, again, we have had detailed conversations. I would say that, certainly, Mexican authorities understand our concerns, but we continue to talk about the way forward.

Mr. MAST. Do you have any message you would like to deliver to the president of Mexico from this committee right now?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I certainly think that those conversations are more productively held in private.

Mr. MAST. Okay. I appreciate it. Since I have a little bit more time, I will go to a different line of questioning. Were you in your post when there was an authorization for, I want to say the number was about $20,000 for drag shows in Ecuador?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes, but that is not an issue that I worked on in any way.

Mr. MAST. Very good. I am just—I am glad to hear that you weren't working on it. It saves you some headache of some questions, but I would be interested in how many people do you think were a part of vetting that, signing off on that as creating the solicitation for it, authorizing the solicitation to go out, and then ultimately approving that solicitation and offering grants? How many people would you say were in that approval process?

Mr. NICHOLS. So as I understand the process, it was done entirely at the post level. It was not a Washington process. It is worth remembering that this grant never actually took place. There was no show, there was——

Mr. MAST. That is right. Political pressure forced it to be ended, no doubt and thankfully. It would have been a waste of $20,000 of taxpayer money. But still the question remains how does that get through to approval? Because it did get to the point of approval, so how many people would you speculate at the post level had to put eyes on that in order for the solicitation, No. 1, to exist and then, No. 2, to be approved?

Mr. NICHOLS. You know, it could be as few as, you know, two or three people. For a small grant to be approved, and my colleagues manage money here so they may have some insights into the broad process, not in this specific instance, but that is something you receive a proposal. It could be handled by local staff. Then, you know, even someone lower than a section chief——

Mr. MAST. It could be a few——

Mr. NICHOLS [continuing]. Depending on the amount——

Mr. MAST. Did you look into it at all? Did you look into who it was?

Mr. NICHOLS. This activity never took place and was canceled——

Mr. MAST. But did you look into who, from your position, did you look into who approved the solicitation and then who ultimately approved the grant?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I talked to the chief of mission, and he told me that neither he, nor the deputy chief of mission, had ever seen anything about this and it was a shock to them.

Mr. MAST. It was a shock. So then there was a discussion about this. Who ultimately approved it? What was the title of the position that approved that?

Mr. NICHOLS. I don't know the answer to that, sir.

Mr. MAST. Did you seek that information?

Mr. NICHOLS. No, sir.

Mr. MAST. Do you believe that is important information for us to know?

Mr. NICHOLS. I think that the important fact is that, when it reached supervisory levels, you know, it didn't progress, it didn't move forward for obvious reasons.

Mr. MAST. My time is expired. We are going to go to Ms. Manning for 5 minutes.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I would like to thank Chair McCaul and Ranking Member Meeks and our witnesses for having this important hearing.

Before we broke for votes, one of my colleagues objected vociferously to your suggestion that President Biden is working to address the problems at the border, and I would like to point out that the Senate had a bipartisan border bill that had been negotiated fiercely, but they reached agreement on the bill. It would have provided serious solutions to the border issue, but, unfortunately, former President Trump told Republicans in Congress that he would rather run on the border issue than solve that problem for the American people. So we never had a chance to vote on that border bill.

I would also like to mention that I am one of the original cosponsors of the first bipartisan comprehensive immigration bill introduced in more than 10 years. It was introduced by one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, Representative Salazar, along with Representative Escobar. I certainly wish that bill was supported by my colleagues on both sides of the aisle because that would address not only the border issues but our other immigration issues.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, I would like to ask you about an issue that has gotten some press recently, and that is a significant increase in migrants who are taking advantage of loose visa requirements in countries like Colombia and Nicaragua to transit to these countries by airplane and trying to get into the United States. And we have read reports that some of them are stuck in those airports, can't get out, because they then can't get the flights they are trying to take the U.S. It has caused enormous problems, but it is also a way for people to come to the U.S. illegally.

So I wonder what the administration is doing to try to crack down on those flights by migrants and, frankly, by traffickers who are putting migrants on those flights. What is being done to get other countries to restrict this route?

Mr. NICHOLS. We have worked with countries around the hemisphere, as well as ICAO and IATA, two key international aviation organizations, to crack down on charter flights that bring irregular migrants into our region. We meet with executives of commercial airlines to sensitize them to the risks of transporting non-bona fide

travelers to our region. We have worked successfully with partners around the hemisphere to impose additional visa restrictions on countries that have a history of sending irregular migrants into our hemisphere. We have worked with partner nations to facilitate the repatriation of irregular migrants back to their countries of origin.

Ms. MANNING. Are you seeing any success?

Mr. NICHOLS. We are seeing success. The charter flight industry of irregular migrants has effectively ceased, and those migrants have tried to use commercial airliners or other means to access the region.

Ms. MANNING. And can you tell me what impact the administration's regional processing centers or Safe Mobility offices has been having on migration from the region since they were established last year?

Mr. NICHOLS. So the Safe Mobility offices have allowed people who wish to migrate to the United States to apply to do so through legal means, whether, for example, it is work-related visas, like the H–2 categories of visas, or other parole mechanisms to access those facilities away from our border. They can do so within the region, and it has prevented thousands and thousands of intending migrants from approaching the U.S. southwest border.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. Mr. Camilleri, can you talk a little bit about more details about the USAID programs to help support civil society in countries with entrenched autocratic regimes, like Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Certainly, Congresswoman. Thank you for the important question. In the limited time we have, just to say precisely in those countries where the regimes that govern those three countries are determined to squash and snuff out civic space, democratic space, USAID is committed to supporting those who champion democracy, free speech, ultimately free elections, and the ability of people in those countries to choose their own leaders and the path that their countries will take. In some places, we are fairly lonely, like in Nicaragua, in championing and supporting that work under difficult circumstances, but it is something that we are very committed to.

Ms. MANNING. My time is about to expire. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Ms. Manning. The chair now recognizes Mr. Davidson, if he is prepared.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I thank the Chairman. I thank our witnesses, and, you know, when Secretary Blinken was here recently, I asked him about the Monroe Doctrine and when or whether it was a calculated decision by the United States to abandon that, and he seemed unfamiliar with the Monroe Doctrine.

If I could just ask each of you, you know, beginning from your right to left, are you familiar with the Monroe Doctrine? Have you heard of this?

Mr. NICHOLS. I am familiar with the Monroe Doctrine. I'm familiar with the Roosevelt Corollary, as well.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you. Mr. Robinson.

Mr. ROBINSON. I am familiar with the Monroe Doctrine.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you.

Mr. CAMILLERI. Yes, sir.

Mr. DAVIDSON. All right. Thank you. So could you summarize it for me?

Mr. NICHOLS. The Monroe Doctrine, the original Monroe Doctrine states to European powers that they should not seek to reestablish their colonies in the Western Hemisphere. That is the original Monroe Doctrine.

Mr. DAVIDSON. And the Roosevelt Corollary, as you see it?

Mr. NICHOLS. The Roosevelt Corollary broadens the Monroe Doctrine to tell foreign powers that they should not seek to establish a presence in the Western Hemisphere or to threaten the United States close to its borders.

Mr. DAVIDSON. So was it a calculated decision by the State Department to abandon that doctrine? And if so, when was that decision made?

Mr. NICHOLS. There is no decision to eliminate the Monroe Doctrine.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Or the Roosevelt Corollary?

Mr. NICHOLS. Or the Roosevelt Corollary.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Well, it is interesting that Secretary Blinken has no recollection of what those things mean. Hopefully, he understands what the policy means. But if you look at the results, you would say, no, it seems like he kind of decided we are not actually going to do that anymore. I mean, the chairman started the hearing off by pointing out the results. So if we are still embracing those policies, how do you reconcile the result?

Mr. NICHOLS. I think we have worked intensively to strengthen our partners and allies in this hemisphere. We work with them on security, democracy, prosperity. The idea that——

Mr. DAVIDSON. If you are not doing anything to counter the other powers coming into the United States, I mean, frankly, it seems like the administration is more concerned about Pride Month activities in Guatemala than they are about China's presence all over the entire hemisphere, I mean, if you look at the agenda, if you look at the Ambassadors and what they are emphasizing.

And in Guatemala, speaking of that, you know, the Secretary of State was just down there trying to get the attorney general fired. Is it an official policy of the United States to get the attorney general of Guatemala fired?

Mr. NICHOLS. The attorney general of Guatemala, Consuelo Porras, is a sanctioned individual who has used her office to attack civil society, to attack anti-corruption crusaders, to go after public officials who have combated corruption. She has facilitated illicit activities in that country for years. She tried to obstruct the democratic process that took place with the election of Bernardo Arevalo. She is a person who has done a lot of very worrisome, very bad things.

Mr. DAVIDSON. So for that, that is why—is it an official State Department policy to revoke the travel privileges for members of the Guatemalan legislature if they don't support removing it? It sounds like there was a gathering where leverage was applied to Guatemala's legislature in order to coerce them into firing somebody that the Biden administration doesn't like. And, frankly, I will point out that wasn't the first time that Joe Biden was working to influence the firing of a prosecutor.

Mr. NICHOLS. We believe that the Guatemalan people should have the right to be led by their democratically elected choice as president——

Mr. DAVIDSON. Do you believe it is fair for the Biden administration, not the United States of America but, frankly, the Biden administration, not acting on behalf of the interests of our country, to threaten the Guatemalan legislature?

Mr. NICHOLS. What we have said is that those who use corrupt means, the payment of bribes, the threats of wrongful prosecution against their own citizens to prevent a democratically elected leader from taking office, that is a threat to democracy——

Mr. DAVIDSON. Well, you know what is a threat to democracy and sovereignty is the invasion of our border, so I would love it if you were using the same kinds of leverage. If you are going to use leverage, use it on behalf of our country to defend America's border because, instead, the Biden administration, with the help of our State Department, has facilitated an invasion of our country. So please focus on our sovereignty in our own country. My time is expired, and I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Davidson. The chair now recognizes Mr. Castro for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASTRO. Assistant Secretary Robinson, where do the majority of firearms used by cartels in Mexico, Central America, or the Caribbean come from?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, sir, for that question. The majority of firearms used by criminals in the region come from the United States.

Mr. CASTRO. And would you say that lax U.S. gun laws are a foreign policy problem for the United States?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, what I would say is the countries in the region, our friends in the region, are challenged to oppose those transnational organizations, criminal organizations, and gangs who are receiving those weapons, and we are challenged here in the United States to help them.

Mr. CASTRO. And when countries in the region, particularly the Caribbean, raise their most important priorities with you—this is for Secretary Nichols—how often does the issue of firearms from the United States come up?

Mr. NICHOLS. It comes up very frequently. We believe that the bipartisan Safer Communities Act was an important step in addressing those concerns. The naming of a special prosecutor in the Department of Justice to lead investigations, the use of technologies like eTrace, training to partners in the northern and southern Caribbean in gun crime investigations has also been responsive to those concerns, but our partners would certainly like us to do even more.

Mr. CASTRO. And, Secretary Robinson, one important tool we have to track and combat the trafficking of firearms is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms' eTrace system, which allows law enforcement to submit forensic information from captured weapons, like serial numbers, to the data base. Other countries can also participate and submit information, and many do, but there are significant gaps in coverage in Mexico, Central America, and the Car-

ibbean. The INL Bureau that you lead helps build capacity in foreign law enforcement agencies.

What are you doing to help foreign law enforcement agencies participate in the eTrace system and track the source of firearms?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you. Actually, we are working very closely with our interagency colleagues at the Department of Justice Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and DHS to broaden the spectrum of the use of eTrace not just in Mexico but in the Caribbean. I was just there. I was there with the special prosecutor, Michael Ben'Ary, to discuss this with our colleagues in the eastern Caribbean, and we are doing what we can to get more countries to enter the information and the evidence into eTrace.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, thank you for that important work. And I raise this issue because we often talk about the very real danger of cartels and the damage that they do, not only in Mexico but to Americans due to trafficking of fentanyl, trafficking of migrants because they often force these people to pay a fee to present themselves at the border. But they are powered by American firearms. They would not be able to succeed the way they do but for the use of American firearms. And even though there is a lot of discussion about these issues on this committee, there is not the same will to actually do something about it and disarm the cartels. So there is a lot of, you know, big statements and aggressive statements against the cartels but actually very weak will to actually do anything about it to disarm them so that they can't accomplish what they are accomplishing now.

I had a second unrelated question on Honduras for you all. U.S. trade representative Katherine Rai has said that "President Biden does not believe corporations should receive special tribunals and trade agreements that are not available to other organizations, and he opposes the ability of private corporations to attack labor, health, and environmental policies through investor State dispute settlements."

Does the State Department share the president's position of opposing investor State dispute settlement policies?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I will just note that I support the president's policies. The specific reference to Honduras is not something that I have tracked closely, and I would appreciate the opportunity to come back to you for the record with a more specific answer.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Castro. The chair now recognizes Mr. Baird for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and ranking member. I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I also appreciate our witnesses taking the time to share with this committee your perspectives.

My question deals, Mr. Assistant Secretary Nichols, the fact that I serve on a subcommittee for foreign affairs on the African subcommittee where we discuss a lot about the Chinese investments and how the U.S. can counter the Belt and Road Initiative. And in this case and in this vein, I want to address China being right at our front doorsteps. Not only have we had the most illegal border crossings by Chinese nationals than we have ever seen, and China has a growing influence in Latin America.

Some economists predict that the Chinese market for Latin America's exports could exceed $700 billion by 2035. And we now know that China is Latin America's top trading partner.

So my question is this: if trade and investments between Latin America and China continue at this rate, what will the impact be on global agriculture markets and the U.S. agriculture exports? I serve on the agriculture committee, as well, so I would appreciate your perspective in that regard.

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, sir. The United States is a leading trading partner for two-thirds of the countries in this hemisphere. But we have to take the challenge seriously, and that means providing good options for countries around the hemisphere, whether it is through Development Finance Corporation, USAID, leveraging IDB lending and IDB Invest to provide access to the kinds of financing that countries need for major infrastructure projects. We are working in a whole host of areas to support agricultural trade and cooperation within the region. Foreign Agricultural Service officers play an important role in many of our embassies around the region in promoting U.S. agricultural exports to the hemisphere, and we believe that our products are the best in the world and can be transformative.

We are working with countries as small as Saint Kitts and Nevis and as big as Brazil to address the agricultural trade issues.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you. And, Mr. Camilleri, you have a considerable amount of experience with USAID, and, being on the agriculture committee, that is of interest to me. So do you have any insights that you would like to share, please?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Thank you, sir. Of course, through our Feed the Future programming, particularly in Guatemala and Honduras, we have strong interests in working with farmers and enhancing food security in many parts of the region.

To your particular question about the link with PRC, you mentioned exports to the PRC, but I would also flag the Chinese exports to the region, as well, and just mention, in Honduras for example, we have been able to work with small older farmers, many of them indigenous, connect them to the largest supermarket chain that was sourcing 90 percent of its garlic, for example, from the PRC and displace those imports with local produce from the farmers that we are supporting. And, actually, the Mexican development agency, AMEXCID, is also supporting in a partnership with USAID. So we are helping to kind of buttress and build more resilient food systems within the region for the region's own benefit but also as a bank shot to building resilience against PRC influence.

Mr. BAIRD. Would it also be your observation that this is successful and we are making progress in competing against the Belt and Road Initiative?

Mr. CAMILLERI. I think, as the assistant secretary mentioned, this is one of the defining strategic challenges of our time. It is not going anywhere. We need to stay at this and be present across the region. We have a four-pillar framework at USAID that is a delegable framework that seeks to put forward our affirmative development model as a part of the ground game in countering PRC influence. So, certainly, we are making progress, but we are not resting on our laurels.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you. And I see my time is almost up, and I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Baird. The chair recognizes Mr. Connolly for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much. Mr. Assistant Secretary Nichols, a little while ago one of my colleagues was praising the attorney general of Guatemala. Is it not true that the attorney general of Guatemala has, in fact, been sanctioned by the U.S. Government for her interference in the peaceful transfer of power in Guatemala?

Mr. NICHOLS. That's correct, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. She has been sanctioned.

Mr. NICHOLS. She's under U.S. sanctions for corruption and interfering with democratic processes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Interfering with democratic process. Right. That ought to be something sanctioned not only in Guatemala but here in the United States.

There has also been a lot of criticism thrown your way about allowing China to have influence in the region. In the previous administration, is it not true that President Trump cutoff aid to Central America?

Mr. NICHOLS. Certainly, there were reductions in assistance to a number of countries in our region proposed by——

Mr. CONNOLLY. But specifically in Central America because of then President Trump's concern about migration patterns; is that not correct?

Mr. NICHOLS. Certainly, that effort was undertaken, yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So three of the countries at that time in Central America who recognized Taiwan, rather than the PRC, what happened during that administration to those three countries in terms of their recognition?

Mr. NICHOLS. So Guatemala continues to recognize Taiwan. Honduras and El Salvador have changed their recognition to the PRC.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I see. Now, Brazil. Brazil was, under Bolsonaro, sort of, there was a warm relationship, reportedly, between President Trump and President Bolsonaro. And, presumably, that would take care of all Chinese influence in Brazil. So what happened to the pattern of, say, U.S. trade and Chinese trade in Brazil?

Mr. NICHOLS. Certainly, if my memory serves, PRC investments in Brazil during that period increased. But I note that the United States continues to be the largest source of foreign direct investigation in Brazil——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. But I'm talking about trade. And Brazil's trade with the United States in that time period, that very time period, fell 11 percent—I'm sorry—fell to the lowest level in 11 years while Chinese trade and exports increased 34 percent during the Trump years. So when we are looking for efficacy in policies, it is easy to rhetorically rail against the influence of China, but, if we are going to start to lay blame and look at records, let's start with the previous administration and how well that rhetoric and those policies and those relationships worked with respect to curbing Chinese influence in the region.

From your point of view, do we need more or fewer resources to combat the competitive threat China poses to us in our own backyard?

Mr. NICHOLS. We need more resource, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. More resources. Have you looked at what the foreign operations appropriation bill that is being marked up here in the House does to your budget and to that of the State Department and foreign diplomacy in general?

Mr. NICHOLS. Our legislative affairs colleagues have briefed me on the contents. I have not seen the contents myself.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And let's say we are looking at a 25—30 percent cut in your resources, how would that help you counter the Chinese threat in the region?

Mr. NICHOLS. That would be a devastating cut to our ability to post our people in the field, to provide assistance in ways that meaningful make us more competitive in the region. We already face significant challenges staffing our posts. We don't have Ambassadors in a number of countries——

Mr. CONNOLLY. But to put it simply, Mr. Assistant Secretary, deep cuts of that magnitude hardly help us in the competition with China, they will, in fact, impede our ability to do that; would that be a fair statement?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. The chair now recognizes Mr. Keen for 5 minutes.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here. Several months ago, reports revealed that Cubans are being recruited to fight for Russia in its illegal continued war of aggression against Ukraine. Has the administration determined that the Cuban regime has either allowed or promoted Cuban mercenaries to fight for Russia? And please explain Russia's current military, political, and economic relationship with Cuba.

Mr. NICHOLS. So we have raised this issue with Cuban officials. I have raised it with my Cuban counterparts. The recruitment of Cubans is something that they expressed concern about, and the reports of that, I think, are worrisome to all of us. The Russian relationship with Cuba militarily continues to be an important relationship for them, and that is evidenced by the fact that Russian ships are visiting Cuba even as we speak.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you. Last week, Claudia Sheinbaum was elected as Mexico's president and will be taking office in October. With the new leadership in Mexico, what are the expectation for negotiations on measures to address and combat the production and trafficking of fentanyl in Mexico and combating it along the southern border?

Mr. ROBINSON. Sir, thank you for that question. As you know, we have a very important relationship with Mexico in terms of stopping, trying to stop the flow of fentanyl from the border. We will have to see what happens when President-Elect Sheinbaum takes office, but indications are that she takes security seriously. During her time as mayor of Mexico City, she increased budgets for the security apparatus in Mexico City significantly, I think something

like 15 percent. That is a strong indication, to us at least, that she will take security seriously when she takes office.

We will, of course, we are reaching out to her team now and look forward to working with her when she is inaugurated.

Mr. KEAN. Her soon-to-be predecessor proved to be a difficult partner in assisting the United States in countering illegal migration stemming from Latin America and the violence of drug cartels. What are the strategies that you are using to counter the illegal migration and to address cartel violence that includes human trafficking?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, I can't speak to migration specifically, but what I will say is we have a very strong relationship with the security team in Mexico currently, and we expect we will have an even stronger relationship with the security team of the new president. We work very closely with the secretariat of the Navy. We are training and equipping both at the Federal level and at the State level. We have an excellent relationship working with our interagency partners at the Department of Justice with the attorney general's office. All of those relationships are important, and we will keep working with them, we anticipate working with them with the new president.

Mr. KEAN. And in an effort to counter the Kremlin's continued influence operations in Latin America, the State Department and OFAC have sanctioned entities, such as the Social Design Agency, the SDA. These groups create campaigns that contain pro-Kremlin propaganda to undermine support for Ukraine and promote anti-U.S. and anti-NATO sentiment. What strategies can the U.S. Department of State employ to effectively counteract misinformation and propaganda campaigns orchestrated by influence for higher firms, like Social Design Agency, in Latin America?

Mr. ROBINSON. So I will note that, through the Global Engagement Center, we seek to counter disinformation from Russia throughout the region. We inform partners of the sourcing. We carry out programs to educate journalists and civil society members about the true origins of the information that they receive. We point out the presence of malign entities, like RT, Russia TV, Russia Today in the region and how they seek to twist the narrative involved. We are continuing to promote training for journalists, for example, so that they can better identify the real sources of the information that is put before them.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Kean. The chair now recognizes Mr. Sherman for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. I am pleased that we are having this hearing on the importance of Latin America. And I would point out that, as we work to secure America's national security and America's interests, that the proposed 11-percent cut in State and foreign ops budget will cut our efforts to be successful, particularly in Latin America.

I want to focus on Haiti for a moment. The security and humanitarian situation in Haiti is dire. Gangs control 80 percent of Port-au-Prince. Nearly a million and a half Haitians are facing famine. 362,000 people are internally displaced. We see young girls regu-

larly the victim of sexual and gender-based violence. In short, gang violence has caused life in Haiti to be unbearable.

However, for more than 6 months, Republicans have repeatedly put up obstacles. They are preventing the release of funds for the Multinational Security Support mission. Mr. Nichols, does that hold on funding for that Multinational Security Support system hurt our ability to stem the root causes of mass migration from Haiti?

Mr. NICHOLS. Yes, sir, it is a serious concern.

Mr. SHERMAN. And looking long term, would the re-authorization of the Haiti HOPE-HELP trade preferences help stabilize economic investment in Haiti, and how would that contribute to strengthening the opportunity for jobs and livelihoods?

Mr. NICHOLS. It is crucial. We have already seen apparel and textile companies close up their operations in Haiti, and they have told us specifically that the re-authorization of HOPE-HELP would give them the certainty that they need to continue in place. In that industry, orders come in 18 months ahead of time, so 2025 is now.

Mr. SHERMAN. Obviously, the security situation and the need for that Multinational Security Support system is critical. Putting that aside, is there other steps Congress can take to bolster private-sector investment in Haiti?

Mr. NICHOLS. Certainly, among the things that are important, beyond trade preferences contained in HOPE and HELP, increasing security. That is the number-one concern that investors cite in their inability to operate in Haiti as the security situation.

Mr. SHERMAN. That is, I think, obvious to anybody who sees what is going on there. Obviously, we are focusing on fentanyl; 110,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year. China has been the primary source of precursor chemicals synthesized into fentanyl in Mexico. If China were to stop providing those precursor chemicals, are they easy for the drug cartels to get from some other source, or would that significantly dent their ability to bring fentanyl into my city?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, sir, for that question. The short answer is it is complicated because some of the chemicals are dual-use chemicals, so they have legal uses. What we continue to ask of the PRC is that they do a better job of——

Mr. SHERMAN. If we were successful with the PRC, would that—I think I have another 30 seconds. The clock is wrong. I will ask you to respond for the record as to whether, if China were successful in stopping those chemicals, whether the drug cartels could get them from some other source.

Mr. ROBINSON. Potentially, yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Mr. HILL. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from Guam is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I just want to say it is a pleasure to join the committee, the procedures committee, and the vital part that it plays for our Nation, and I am looking forward to working with all of my members here.

Now, while my district lies within the Indo-Pacific, the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific share many of the same issues. Guam's proximity to the People's Republic of China means that great power

competition by aggressive nations affects us on a daily basis. So the Western Hemisphere, Latin America and the Caribbean, are no different. And, additionally, larger operations, like Russia, flag to convenience shipping, and the PRC's One Belt, One Road Initiative means that these nations can negatively influence ever region of the world.

So, Assistant Secretary Robinson, illegal, unregulated, and unrestricted fishing is a problem that affects populations globally. Both in the Americas and the Indo-Pacific, IUU fishing is used as a regular tool by the People's Republic of China. Yet, despite initiatives of Maritime SAFE, this program continues to proliferate across the globe.

So, Assistant Secretary Robinson, how is the Department of State changing its approach to counter the ongoing threat more effectively?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you for that question. I think you hit the nail on the head. This is a global issue that requires all of our partner nations to be involved in defending against. We are working very closely, for instance, with Panama, with Ecuador, with other countries in the eastern Caribbean to give them the ability and the capacity to have a better awareness of their domain, territorial domain, to identify these illegal fleets and to work with us, partner with us, to combat them and to raise these issues with the PRC.

Mr. MOYLAN. I appreciate that. I would just like to see more U.S. ships' interest out there to deter CCP. Also, another question for you, sir. Chemicals essential to creating fentanyl or other drugs are often given to Latin America-based transnational criminal organizations (TCO) from actors within the People's Republic of China. So, Assistant Secretary Robinson, how have external State actors, like PRC, disrupt State operations in this field and damage the region as a whole?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, while I would tweak that a little bit because we don't have evidence that the PRC is, as a government, is allowing these chemicals to go to transnational criminal organizations. We do know that there are industries in the PRC that are selling these chemicals to and trafficking these chemicals to transnational criminal organizations. That is without a doubt.

We are working with our partners. We are working at a global level to identify both the companies and the networks and working with them to bring them down.

Mr. MOYLAN. Okay. And if you need help from this committee, I am more than happy to work with you to expedite this process because it is killing America basically.

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, sir.

Mr. MOYLAN. Finally, just a minute here, since taking office, President Lula da Silva has aggressively sought to deepen Brazil's ties with China, and China is Brazil's largest trading partner and has invested so much money, and, basically, going to China and asking for help with critical infrastructure, railways, energy port, and all their projects. So CCP is basically buying them up, so what are we doing to prevent this?

Mr. ROBINSON. We have robust engagement with Brazil across a whole host of areas. The United States works with our private sector to promote trade and investment. The Amcham in Brazil, its

members account for about two-thirds of the value of Brazilian GDP. We work with Brazilian officials to try and remove barriers to our commercial relations, and we seek to leverage the tools that we have, whether it is EXIM, DFC, USAID, Inter-American Development Bank, so that U.S. businesses will be competitive in competing for infrastructure and other major projects in Brazil.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you for that. I ran out of time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HILL. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from Arizona is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Western Hemisphere, it is ripe for near-shoring, moving our supply lines closer to the United States market, and this is our moment to act. If the last few years have taught us anything, it is that we need to diversify our supply chains and bring them closer to the United States market. For national security reasons, we can't rely on China to produce critical technology. For economic reasons, we should encourage businesses to continue moving to the Western Hemisphere after seeing pandemic shortages. And for common sense reasons, we should work to multiply the impact of our historic investments here at home, including the CHIPS Act and the bipartisan infrastructure law, by creating regional ecosystems.

Mexico has always been Arizona's No. 1 trading partner. Now they are the No. 1 trading partner of the entire United States, and the U.S.-Mexico-Canada agreement, which has been pivotal on both sides of the border, will be up for review in 2026. We should be gearing up for this by seizing this moment to make investments, to encourage our partners in Latin America, in the Caribbean, to make investments and to strengthen ties with our neighbors. This should include investments in the semiconductor supply chain, particularly the upstream parts, including critical mineral mining and processing, and downstream parts, like testing and packaging.

On the upstream side, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and others have large deposits of minerals that are critical for making semiconductors. Building industries that mine and process those minerals would make them formidable players. On the downstream side, Intel already has an assembly and testing facility in Costa Rica, and states in northern Mexico have expressed deep interest in getting involved, as well. In fact, two schools in my district, Arizona State University and Mesa Community College, are working with the Department of Commerce to train Mexican students for the semiconductor workforce.

My push is that we use all of our tools, our schools, universities, Development Finance Corporation, the State Department's International Technology Security and Innovation Fund, and our historic investment in the CHIPS and Science Act to shore up national security, diversify our supply chain, develop stable jobs in Latin America, and create a regional semiconductor ecosystem.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, Mexico has lots of work to do to address near-shoring challenges. It needs to open up its energy policy and rein in the cartels. How should the United States encourage President-Elect Sheinbaum to tackle such obstacles to near-shoring investment?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, first, let me just wholeheartedly agree with everything that you have said. And with regard to Mexico, Mexico is one of the leading recipients of foreign direct investment in the world, particularly in northern Mexico. President-Elect Sheinbaum is a scientist. She worked with one of the labs with U.S. Department of Energy, and I think demonstrating to her with the hard facts the importance of these issues and laying out the scientific case will be compelling for her.

Mr. STANTON. I have another question for you, Assistant Secretary Nichols. On Monday, President-Elect Sheinbaum spoke about the AMLO-proposed judicial overhaul that could upset the balance of power in Mexico and create market unrest. How do you anticipate that Mexico's recent election and the proposed judicial changes will affect American treatment into Mexico?

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, obviously, Mexico is a sovereign country, and they have procedures that they can use to change their legal framework. We believe that judicial transparency is vital for all investors, whether they are domestic Mexican investors or international investors, particularly those from the United States and Canada as USMCA partners. We will continue to insist whatever the future legal regime is in Mexico that all the signatories to USMCA respect the protection of foreign investment provisions in that agreement.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you. And I recently introduced H.R. 8414, the Semiconductor Supply Chain Security and Diversification Act, a bipartisan bill which directs the Development Finance Corporation to invest in parts of the semiconductor supply chain in the Western Hemisphere, regardless of income classification. Assistant Secretary Nichols, beyond investments from the Development Finance Corporation, how should we be working with other Latin America and Caribbean governments to attract near-shoring opportunities, particularly the critical mineral processing or testing and packaging operations to build a robust regional supply chain?

Mr. NICHOLS. Undersecretary Jose Fernandez has been leading our efforts around critical minerals in the region, bringing countries into the supply chain, securing those assets for the mutual benefit of our partners around the hemisphere. We have seen already investments, as I referred to in my opening statement, in Costa Rica, for example——

Mr. HILL. The gentleman's time is expired.

Mr. NICHOLS. So we will continue to work on that.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. HILL. The gentleman has yielded back. The gentlewoman from Florida, Ms. Salazar, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SALAZAR. Thank you very much. Wonderful to see you, all of you. Mr. Robinson, Mr. Nichols. Mr. Nichols, we saw each other in El Salvador a couple of days ago. Wonderful to have seen you there for the second inaugural of President Bukele.

Salvador was the murder capital of the world at one point and now is the safest country in Western Hemisphere. Not bad. But, you know, that Bukele was not one of your favorites. What did he do right?

Mr. NICHOLS. President Bukele and his government have implemented a comprehensive rule of law programming. The frontal ef-

fort to control the gangs in El Salvador is impressive and something that many countries are watching with great interest.

We are concerned, however, that such policies should include a respect for the rule of law and the opportunity for all citizens to receive——

Mrs. SALAZAR. Of course. I was the first one who told him we do not want anyone who is innocent in jail. You agree with me. But do you still agree that they did a great job? Even the State Department is saying, Okay, well, maybe we should copy this.

Mr. NICHOLS. Well, I think that we can help countries implement police that address crime and still respect the rule of law and human rights.

Mrs. SALAZAR. No doubt it. I am sure they want that, too. All right. I only have 5 minutes, so I have to move to the other one. Let's go to Cuba. The newest economic policy allows Cubans to use our banks, the United States banks, to transfer money anywhere around the world, supposedly for trade purposes. And I have no doubt that the Biden administration had the most noble interest in helping the Cuban people. But we know the Cuban regime. And you know what could happen? One of the problems is that let's say that the regime forms a company and it disguises in a company that is buying tomatoes from Turkey. So a Cuban company buys tomatoes from Turkey, and, in reality, what they are doing is laundering money for Hezbollah.

Our banking system doesn't need to know this. You know that's a possibility. So what do you think—haven't you thought about this?

Mr. NICHOLS. So the regulations that we have put in place will help thousands of independent Cuban businesses. The individuals who participate are screened. The participation of Cuban government officials is specifically prohibited.

Mrs. SALAZAR. But wait a minute. The Cubans are intelligent, and they are going to find Pepe or Berta and they are going to say, hey, come on, you are going to put together this little trade, this little business, and we are going to be selling tomatoes to Turkey. And in reality, they are behind it because you know that is what they do. We don't do that, but they do.

So my only question is what can we really do in order to prevent that? Because we don't want the Cubans to be using the United States banking system to launder money and to help our enemies. Do you understand that that is a possibility?

Mr. NICHOLS. Certainly that the United States financial system continues to have compliance requirements and know your customer requirements. They screen their customers very carefully, and we will work with the financial system to ensure that there are measures in place to prevent those types of transactions.

Mrs. SALAZAR. And don't you think that maybe, when it comes to the Cubans, we should implement even more layers because of their intentions?

Mr. NICHOLS. The goal is to promote private sector development in Cuba.

Mrs. SALAZAR. I am sure, but that is not the goal of the regime. The regime doesn't care if people eat. They are in the business of power. But we will work together on that.

Now, Mr. Robinson, wonderful to talk to you. You know, my time is running out. Guatemala. Guatemala. We have a situation in Guatemala with a lady by the name of Consuelo Porras. The State Department has Porras in the crosshairs. I don't know her, I have never seen her, I have never spoken with her. She is the AGRICULTURE of Guatemala, and the president appointed her. Now she is sanctioned by the United States. And while you were Ambassador, Mr. Robinson, she picked out something called the CICIG because, according to the Guatemalans, it was politicized.

We may think that they are a bunch of banana republics, and some of them are, and I have called them out on it. But, you know, they have the right to name whomever they want to as AG, and we don't have the right to say, oh, you are going to name Maria but not Rosa. So my question is has she done anything right?

Mr. ROBINSON. Just a point of clarification. CICIG was kicked out after I left Guatemala.

Mrs. SALAZAR. No, I understand, but the State Department doesn't like her one bit. And she's been sanctioned. So I just am—has she done anything right? Why are we persecuting this lady?

Mr. ROBINSON. She has been sanctioned for undermining democratic institutions and the free and fair election—attempting to undermine the free and fair election in Guatemala.

Mrs. SALAZAR. But do you know how many people have done that in Latin America have done that, and they have not been sanctioned, like the President of Argentina, the President of Ecuador? I mean, we have a lot of people who have done that. Why her in particular?

Mr. HILL [presiding]. The gentlelady's time has expired. Would you please answer her question in writing, please? And the gentlelady's time has expired. The gentleman from Rhode Island is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Camilleri and Assistant Secretary Robinson for being here today, and Assistant Secretary Nichols, as a point of personal privilege. It is always great to see another Rhode Islander and certainly a fellow Quaker, Moses Brown Quaker today.

As we all know and have covered today, the Western Hemisphere faces complex and interconnected challenges, whether it is regional violence and corruption, climate change and food insecurity, or the issue of regional mass migration. Because of this, the State Department and USAID have a responsibility to engage with partners and allies as we work to increase security and stability in our own backyard.

Full funding of this work has never been more vital. One area where the State Department has a proven track record is its support of democracies in the Americas that are working to fight corruption.

Returning to the topic of Guatemala, now President Ar?valo ran on a platform of anti-corruption during the tumultuous 2023 election. Yet despite his landslide victory, President Ar?valo is now facing serious challenges to his anti-corruption policies from the Attorney General, Attorney General Poras.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, how is the State Department supporting Guatemala's anti-corruption efforts and specifically how

would the funding cuts proposed by Republicans affect your ability to continue the work in Guatemala to eradicate public corruption?

Mr. NICHOLS. Thank you, Mr. Amo. And as our staff said, agreed. I do have a hard stop because I had to get on a plane and give the commencement address at our alma mater in Providence, Rhode Island. But let me just briefly address your question.

We are working with the government of Guatemala on comprehensive reforms that will promote private sector investment, address lack of development in the highlands of Guatemala where most irregular migrants originate from, putting in place structures that will prevent corrupt activities within the various institutions of the State and strengthening the justice and law enforcement sectors.

The resources that we receive are crucial to that effort. The largest sender of irregular migrants in Central America is Guatemala, and we have to work with them across a whole host of areas to strengthen their capabilities.

Mr. AMO. Given the time constraints, I will yield back the remainder of my time. Thank you.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. The gentleman yields back. Secretary, thank you for your participation. I hope your speech goes well. I hope it's memorable. And I hope you will respond promptly to the questions the committee submits to you. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions. Mr. Nichols' questions are going to go to you now, Mr. Robinson. So get ready for that and enjoy it.

Mr. ROBINSON. I'll answer what I can.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. Yes, thank you. Eight men from Tajikistan with ties to ISIS were arrested over the weekend in New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles by personnel by ICE in addition to reporting claims that six of these eight are Russian nationals. Are you familiar with this case?

Mr. ROBINSON. I read about it either yesterday or this morning.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. Okay. But you are the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, right?

Mr. ROBINSON. That's correct.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. Okay, well. All eight of these men crossed the border through the southern border. Their criminal background checks reportedly returned clean when they crossed into the U.S. At least two of the men crossed the border in the spring of 2023, and one of them used the CBP One App, which the Biden Administration created to allow migrants to book appointments to claim asylum, but it has been abused to expedite mass importation of illegal aliens who come to the U.S. for economic or mischievous opportunities rather than a credible fear on asylum.

My Republican colleagues and I have been sounding the alarm about this for over a year. Some 300 people on the Terror Watch List have crossed the border. We've had 1.7 million known "got aways". So Director Wray says this is one of the most serious concerns he has about the potential for, really potentially terror attacks.

How are the Tajiki and Russian nationals arriving in Central and South America to begin with? Do you have any information on

that? It's clearly connected also to your migration job on drug trafficking. So what are your views on that?

Mr. ROBINSON. Right. Honestly, I would have to defer to my colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. What steps does the State Department take to intervene before foreign adversaries like this arrive at our southern border and are granted admission into the country?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, we work very closely with our partners in the region, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. Is it fair to say that the 300 people that have been caught on the Terror Watch List, these are the ones caught, not the ones not caught, have flown to Mexico more than likely from a third country?

Mr. ROBINSON. Honestly, I can't answer that.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. But you can say you are working with the country of Mexico and other countries in the region to identify potential people that are in drug trafficking or have an adversarial interest in the region. So the question is, what about that? What is Mexico telling you about people who have flown into their country that are on the Terror Watch List——

Mr. ROBINSON. Again——

Mr. HILL [presiding].—or a No Fly List?

Mr. ROBINSON. Again, I would have to defer to my colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security.

But what I will say is we have a very close working relationship with Mexican authorities on issues such as migration, transnational organized crime, and corruption. We continue to work very closely with them and we look forward to working closely with them with the new President.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. Well, I'm going to submit my questions for the record because I am not going to be able to get the answers to my questions. And therefore, I will yield the time back.

The gentleman from California is recognized. The gentlewoman from California is recognized. Pardon me.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I do think it is ironic that we are discussing the need to counter PRC influence in the Western Hemisphere when my Republican colleagues are seeking to slash the international affairs budget by a devastating 11 percent. And these drastic cuts will lead to U.S. absence in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that already gets less attention and resources than it deserves.

I recently came back from a trip to Brazil, and it was focused on JAPER. A number of very critical discussions came out of that trip.

So Acting Assistant Administrator Camilleri, I was concerned to hear reports of forced conversions and religious discrimination against groups that practice African-based religions in Brazil. Does USAID view the protection of these groups as cultural heritage and tradition as linked to better development outcomes?

Mr. ROBINSON. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question. Certainly, we would. Our programming in Brazil, as you probably heard, is quite limited to the environmental area, some cooperation on health as well as on migration management in supporting the integration efforts of the Brazilian government. So we wouldn't

have the programming specifically in that area, but I think we could associate ourselves with your concern.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. So how do you manage sort of localized resources and support and infrastructure across the Western Hemisphere? I would imagine that it should not wear a one size fits all model. But please share because I have heard that that is not happening.

Mr. CAMILLERI. This is a priority for us globally. Administrator Power has set ambitious targets for localizing USAID's effort. As you said, it's not easy, and it can't be one size fits all.

Within the Western Hemisphere, we've actually been at the tip of spear in some ways in this effort in Central America with an initiative called Central America Local.

And to give you a sense of the progress we have made in Fiscal Year 2020, 3 percent of our funding in Central America went directly to local organizations. In the last Fiscal Year that was up to 21 percent. And we have a global target of 25 percent, which we expect to meet in the next year or two in Central America.

We have made, I think, substantial progress in some other areas of the region, Paraguay being perhaps the best example. In other places, there is more work to do but this is, again, a global priority and one that Administrator Power has placed a premium on.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. I just want to say if the framework model shouldn't be the same for each country, the measurables and the metrics also should not be the same because there are different countries. There is different kinds of collaboration. There is different kinds of capacity, et cetera. So please take that back.

Assistant Secretary Robertson—Robinson—apologies. How does U.S. contributions to the Amazon fund help counter the deforestation caused by criminal actors engaged in illegal mining practices?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, I don't know the specifics of the fund. But I will say illegal mining is among our concerns in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. We know that transnational organized criminals are expanding on what they are illegally moving through the atmosphere.

Illegal mining is among those things. Arms, other environmental crimes are of great concern. And for instance, we are working very closely both in Ecuador and Colombia to offer capacity building and training to their police, specifically on the issue of environmental crimes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. And they are also smuggling out—well, killing habitation and smuggling out animals that are coming into this country that they shouldn't be.

So there was a question about Mexico obviously or new election. So I want to know how you plan to engage with this new administration, especially concerning risks around the militarization of a governing approach.

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, first of all, we are already—we have already begun engaging with the incoming administration through our embassy and through Assistant Secretary Nichols' office.

We will continue to engage and raise the issues of security as we have with the previous government.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. The gentlewoman's time has expired. Now we turn to the chairwoman of the Indo-Pacific Subcommittee, Young Kim of California for 5 minutes.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you, Chairman. And I want to thank the witnesses for staying late to answer all of our questions.

You know, I recently came back from a CODEL to Taiwan. And in all of our engagements, there was a constant theme of the Chinese Communist Party ramping up pressure on Taiwan's bilateral partners throughout the region and throughout the world into switching their diplomatic recommendation to the CCP.

As you know when President Tsai started her term 5 years ago, we had—or Taiwan had 22 partners. As President Lai is starting his new term, he is working with only 12 partners around the world in the region.

So since 2017, five countries in Latin America have cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan and established official diplomatic relations with the CCP.

So can you talk about some of those CCP pressure tactics in the region? What are you seeing? Mr. Camilleri, do you want to start?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Sure. Well, I think we saw an example of this just in the last few days with some Guatemalan exports being rejected from the PRC. So clearly economic coercion is one of the forms of pressure that is being brought on countries that are committed to continuing to recognize Taiwan.

I had the opportunity to accompany Secretary Blinken recently to Guatemala for a really productive bilateral conversation with President Arevalo and his team. And President Arevalo conveyed his commitment, his government's commitment to maintain the recognition of Taiwan.

But I think we see very clearly and very transparently the kind of pressure that is being brought against such governments. And, you know, we have, I think, some tools that we can bring to bear on this in terms of helping our partners.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. What are some of the tools that you are talking about?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Pardon me?

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. What are some of the tools?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Yes, so I think—just to name a couple, certainly in the procurement space where we have seen the PRC very focused on major infrastructure for example, often using corruption, often not respecting local environmental and labor standards. Oftentimes with pretty shoddy results in terms of the infrastructure that's built. You know, bringing awareness to what that track record looks like, building international standards into procurement processes.

We have done this very successfully in the Dominican Republic for example, in the Port of Manzanillo by working with the Army Corps of Engineers to build those international standards into procurement processes so that U.S. consortia were able to win to win contracts where PRC companies had been well-placed to do so.

That is one of the ways in which we can buildup with awareness and provide alternatives to countries that want to partner with us as the preferred partner. But we need to put those alternative options——

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Absolutely.

Mr. CAMILLERI [continuing]. On the table for them.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Our words need to follow with our actions, too. So thank you for that.

You know, I also want to ask about the CCP, which is making large scale investments in cultural programming throughout the hemispheres. For example, there are over 40 CCP Confucius Institutes throughout Latin America. And CCP and Latin American universities are participating in joint research and exchange programs.

So can you talk about USAID's work in programming to counter such soft power influence in the region?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Sure. Hey, look, I think broadly speaking, our affirmative development model is our competitive advantage in the region. We are not saddling countries with debt. We are not looking to bring in our own workers.

We are generally partnering in a transparent and rules-based manner looking to move them ultimately from aid to trade. We want our partners to prosper. We don't want them to be beholden to us and saddled with predatory lending. We don't want our partners to——

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Let me ask one question to Assistant Secretary Robinson because we know that CCP plays a major role in the global fentanyl supply chain. And Chinese brokers intentionally sell precursor chemicals to Mexican cartels who then produce and smuggle fentanyl into the United States.

So can you talk about how the State Department is engaging our allies and partners in the region to ensure they take CCP drug trafficking very seriously?

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. And also maybe you can talk about the so-called fentanyl working group that the U.S. and China established late last year in November.

Mr. ROBINSON. Absolutely. I will be very quick. I have had four opportunities to speak directly with my PRC counterparts, twice in Beijing, once in Vienna.

The Global Coalition Against Synthetic Drugs is our broader effort to engage with countries around the world on this issue. Over 155 countries, over 15 international organizations are involved.

Mr. HILL [presiding]. The gentlewoman's time has expired. Please if you would like to finish your answer in writing. That would be helpful to the gentlewoman from California. Ms. Titus from Nevada is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since you are talking about the influence of China and our competition with China, I would ask you that doesn't our policy, if it follows President Trump's maximum pressure like in Cuba drive some of these countries into the arms of China as opposed to our wanting to do more foreign aid or more investment or a more cooperative approach work better to compete with China than to just cut things off and push them in that direction?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Well, I am not a China expert, but we do deal with China a lot, compete with China a lot around the world. I would say our competitive advantage, as mentioned by my col-

league, Michael, is that what we do around the world with our partners is transparent and above board, and doesn't involve predatory lending practices.

And so as we deal with our partners around the world and expose them to what we are offering and how we are offering it by partnering with them as opposed to China, we think that we have a better product to sell.

Ms. TITUS. I think so too. But you can't just look at this from an economic standpoint. There is a lot of politics involved in this. And depending on the administration, it depends on how much you are actually engaged in the process that you described. But, Okay, I appreciate that.

Earlier in the hearing, my Republican colleague from Florida once again got on his rant in attacking the LGBTQ community. This is nothing new. The Republicans have been trying to marginalize this community for every turn of this Congress. Yet we are the beacon for human rights here in the United States, and we ought to push for that. Our foreign policy should reflect that. It should reflect respect for other communities, protect human rights around the world.

Mr. Camilleri, would you address why you think it might be a better way to do policy to include all these communities? There was a little chance to discuss it earlier. But I don't think it came out very strongly.

Mr. CAMILLERI. Yes, I think these things are actually linked, which is to say part of our competitive advantage over countries like the PRC is precisely that we bring American values to bear in the way that we operate.

And fundamentals of those American values is a belief in democracy and a belief in fundamental human rights and, of course, LGBTQ+ rights are human rights.

Ms. TITUS. Well, we've seen democracy backsliding in a lot of parts of the world and a lot of legislation being passed that attacks this community kind of in particular. How does the State Department try to counter that or deal with those kind of policies in countries where we want to have better relations?

Mr. CAMILLERI. I think the question may have been for the State Department so I will let the Assistant Secretary take it away.

And from USAID standpoint, we are in many places supporting advocates to engage their governments on behalf of the quality and dignity for all populations as well as using our own kind of diplomatic relationships to advocate directly for, again, respect for universal human rights.

Ms. TITUS. You know, I serve on the House democracy partnership. Guatemala is one of the countries that we have a partnership with. Peru, we are working on. And so I have seen you all's work in supporting some NGO's, supporting the drafting of some legislation. Could you address that? Is that not a way to also deal with this in a more specific kind of answer?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Yes, that's precisely—I think, Congresswoman, that is precisely the kind of work that in some places we are able to partner with civil society to do, which is to engage, for example, with their legislatures to—or with their court systems. And we

have seen actually some encouraging decisions from courts in the region that are more protective of fundamental equality.

And so we are able to—we can partner with NGO's with civil society organizations, some cases directly with governments that are committed to expanding protections for the LGBTQ community, which in many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean unfortunately subject not just to discrimination but significant violence in order to provide those protections.

Mr. ROBINSON. I would just add that the same goes for security, which is where my perspective is. We are working to make sure that police departments for instance, both at the Federal and State level, are protecting all members of society, marginalized communities, indigenous communities, LBGTQ communities as well.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. Thank you. Secretary Robinson, I will ask you first because I know you are very kindly staying over your departure time. And I appreciate that.

Obviously, there has been a rise in narcotics coming into this country. But there is also a rise in narcotics affecting countries in the Western Hemisphere. Can you give me your best prognosis on whether it is Mexico or the return of drugs to Colombia and so on, what the likely effect is if we cannot reverse that trend in those countries of drugs often intended for us, but they also get consumed in the countries in which they pass through.

Mr. ROBINSON. No, absolutely it is a threat. And I would say frankly the Office of National Drug Control Policy has better statistics and more expertise. But both of those countries have reached to ONDCP about the rise in local usage of narcotics and synthetic drugs. And this is happening around the world. We get it from our partners in Europe and Asia as well.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. So I just want to ask a leading question if you can indulge me. Would you say from your experience and from the experience of the State Department, that one of the kindest things we can do is have a strict enforcement policy both here at our border and in cooperation with these countries because if we don't, we are not just causing drugs to come into the United States, but we are, in fact, affecting this very stability of these countries, most of them to our south?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, No. 1, I think it is incumbent upon every country to secure their borders. But what we want to do is strike a balance, right? We want to make sure that we are stopping the bad things that are coming in but allowing trade, allowing the free flow of investment.

And that is a little tricky. That is why I think it is good that we work with the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice and have an interagency team that is looking at all of the different aspects of this so that we can address this issue.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. Well, I will just share with you. I have the busiest land border in the world there in San Diego. And if it were not for the incredible amount of drugs coming over that land port, if it were not for all the procedures and the delays that are caused by that, even with the most effective and efficient modern technology, some of which are sniffing dogs, but we would, in fact, be able to run that port with a third or half as many actual lanes.

There is no question that drugs, and to a certain extent human smuggling, make a huge difference in our effectiveness.

Thank you. And I may have more questions for the record. But I wanted to thank you for remaining.

Administrator, I want to ask you sort of—you have been on the job—I know you are acting—but you have been on the job and in the area long enough to see the effects of a number of administrations in years of USAID.

Under the Trump Administration, there was an attempt to dramatically consolidate some portions of our foreign aid and investment. Some was consolidated. Some wasn't. I happened to be during that time at TDA. So it was one of the small agencies that wasn't.

From your perspective, are you better off with a multitude of small agencies and agencies that sometimes even compete, sometimes coordinate, and that would include, of course, the EXIM Bank and others, Millennium Challenge, or in fact should this committee continue to look at a direction toward competing against China and other "aid producers" that aren't always aid deliverers, to have a more, if you will, coordinated attempt?

And I know that is a broad question, but it is one that I think we need to look at that we created the Millennium Challenge. We have created each of those agencies. This committee was responsible for making TDA an independent agency back in the 90's. We did it all for good reason. But is that still clearly an impediment when you have to run to Commerce and run to a lot of places to try to put together your programs?

Mr. CAMILLERI. Thank you, Congressman. That is a big question, maybe slightly above my pay grade. But I appreciate——

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. You don't have to comment on the DOD part of it. I will leave that part alone at least.

Mr. CAMILLERI. All right. It will keep me out of trouble. I think what I would say is you used the word coordination. And that ultimately is critical because what you have provided to us is across the interagency with a broad set of tools and maybe the most recent one being a pretty powerful one in the DOC.

We have seen that when we bring that full toolkit to bear, we can be very effective. Ecuador has come up here today as a place that is facing some really significant challenges that has both the prior government and this one the strongest in partnering with us to meet those challenges.

DOC has actually responded in a big way in Ecuador. I think it is per capita the biggest market now for the development of finance corporations.

So that in combination with what USAID is doing, what INL is doing, I think is a good example of when we bring those various tools to bear on a specific challenge and opportunity in terms of that bilateral relationship how we can be effective.

But I think to your point, the challenge for us in the administration is making sure that we are coordinating among those various tools.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. So I am going to close with just one question for you. Not to say that we need to create yet another hat somewhere in some agency or above an agency, but should there

be a single point of contact reporting, if you will, to the President for coordinating, for competing because some of your activities—obviously you are not in the State Department even though you partner with them. You are not in Treasury, even though you partner with them. You are not in Commerce, even though—and the list goes on. Is in fact that sort of question of who above your pay grade could ensure that that cooperation doesn't just occur sometimes but occurs all the time?

Mr. CAMILLERI. I think I would say, and the Assistant Secretary may have reflections on this as well based on his tenure, you know, we see each other a lot.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. I know you try. I am not for a moment doubting the effort. I just was asking the question. And maybe for the Assistant Secretary that would be a good question, can we do it better?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, I would absolutely agree with you that we should always be asking the question, can we do it better?

It is, again, tricky, right because all of our authorities are different and the way we get money is different. That is why accordingly——

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. Even the color of how you can spend it is different.

Mr. ROBINSON. Exactly. And so that is why the coordinating responsibility of the NEC is so important, making sure that we all get together to hash these things out.

As Michael said, we spent a lot of time together anyway. But could we do it better and more effectively? Absolutely.

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. Okay. Well, in closing, if you wouldn't mind opining with further thoughts either without questions or I will be happy to add additional questions.

But it is an area where I think for the long term good of this committee, we need to look and say can we provide ability for you to do it better, which might include changing, if you will, the color of money the authorities, coordination, and so on. I am not on the Armed Services Committee, but I hear from them often their strengths and weaknesses because they can spend money different than you.

With that, I want to thank all of the witnesses for their valuable testimony. Members will have their questions submitted. We would ask that you be willing within—if you receive them within five legislative days to respond promptly.

Pursuant to the committee rules, all members will have 5 days to submit statements, questions and extraneous material for the record, subject to the length limitations. Without objection, that is ordered. And we stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:04 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN MCCAUL

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Michael T. McCaul (R-TX), Chairman

June 5, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held at 10:00 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website. https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/.

DATE:	Wednesday, June 12, 2024
TIME:	10:00 a.m.
LOCATION:	2172 RHOB
SUBJECT:	Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere
WITNESSES:	The Honorable Brian Nichols Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs U.S. Department of State The Honorable Todd Robinson Assistant Secretary Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs U.S. Department of State Mr. Michael Camilleri Acting Assistant Administrator Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean U.S. Agency for International Development

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202 -226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Wednesday* Date *June 12, 2024* Room *2172 RHOB*

Starting Time *1004* Ending Time *1304*

Recesses *1* (*1100* to *1131*) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman McCaul, Rep. Hill, Rep. Issa

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☑

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING:

Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *1304*

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Date: JUNE 12, 2024 HEARING

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. McCaul	X		Mr. Meeks	X	
Mr. Smith		X	Mr. Sherman	X	
Mr. Wilson	X		Mr. Connolly	X	
Mr. Perry	X		Mr. Keating	X	
Mr. Issa	X		Mr. Bera		X
Mrs. Wagner	X		Mr. Castro	X	
Mr. Mast	X		Ms. Titus	X	
Mr. Burchett		X	Mr. Lieu		X
Mr. Green		X	Ms. Wild		X
Mr. Barr		X	Mr. Phillips		X
Mr. Jackson		X	Mr. Allred	X	
Mrs. Kim	X		Mr. Kim	X	
Mrs. Salazar	X		Ms. Jacobs		X
Mr. Huizenga	X		Ms. Manning	X	
Mrs. Radewagen		X	Mrs. Cherfilus-McCormick	X	
Mr. Hill	X		Mr. Stanton	X	
Mr. Davidson	X		Ms. Dean	X	
Mr. Baird	X		Mr. Moskowitz		X
Mr. Waltz	X		Mr. Jackson	X	
Mr. Kean	X		Mrs. Kamlager-Dove	X	
Mr. Lawler	X		Mr. Costa	X	
Mr. Mills		X	Mr. Crow		X
Mr. McCormick	X		Mr. Amo	X	
Mr. Moran		X	Mr. Schneider	X	
Mr. James		X	Mr. Mfume		X
Mr. Self	X				
Mr. Zinke	X				
Mr. Moylan	X				

"Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere"
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Hearing
10:00 AM, June 12, 2024
Rayburn 2172
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you to Chairman McCaul and Ranking Member Meeks for calling this important hearing. We meet today at a crucial time for Latin America and the Caribbean: The region has remained relatively peripheral to global economic integration, lagging behind in technological advancement, and failing to reap the benefits of the global technological boom that has benefited the West and Indo-Pacific.[1] Unilateral withdrawal during the Trump administration left the region without a partner that could provide a path to prosperity for democracies in the region. As member states audibly laughed at former President Trump during the United Nations General Assembly, the People's Republic of China made major inroads in Latin America, becoming South America's top trading partner and the second-largest for Latin America as a whole, after the United States. Should the United States want to push back against China's footprint in the region, we must offer a clear vision for what a democratic, prosperous, and secure Western Hemisphere looks like, and increase our investments accordingly.

Increased engagement to provide our partners and allies a viable alternative to PRC investment must come through fully funding the operations of the State Department and USAID, as well as other agencies helping drive important investments in the region. Remarkably, House Republicans have proposed a 11% cut to the International Affairs Budget, a cut that would severely hamstring the U.S.'s ability to counter China's pervasive economic activity. As of 2023, Beijing has free trade agreements in place with Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru, and twenty-one Latin American countries have so far signed on to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[2] That number will only increase if Republicans have their way and deny critical funding to the region, mimicking the unilateral withdrawal of the Trump Administration that only benefited China's expansion in the Western Hemisphere.

This hearing also allows us to speak positively about our vision for a free, democratic, prosperous Western Hemisphere that respects human rights and gives people an economic chance. That means increasing ties with democracies like the Dominican Republic, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil, among others. That is why I introduced the Strengthening the Rule of Law in the Brazilian Amazon Act, bipartisan legislation to work with Brazil to increase investment in Brazil and counter organized criminal and drug trafficking groups who are devastating communities in and around the Brazilian Amazon, upending the rule of law, and accelerating environmental degradation and deforestation. This Congress, the Senate finally ratified the Chilean tax treaty removing an important barrier to increased investment in a democratic ally. I was proud to lead the effort in introducing H.Res. 487, a resolution supporting the ratification of the Chilean tax treaty.

These two efforts undergird a general shift that the United States must make towards our allies in the region and away from adversarial competitors. Economic shocks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic illuminated vulnerabilities in the U.S. economy's supply chain. Overreliance on the People's Republic of China caused shortages of goods requiring semiconductors, which include anything from smartphones to

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[1] Cadena, Andres; White, Olivia, Lamanna, Camillo, "What could a new era mean for Latin America?" *Mckinsey Global Institute,* July 20, 2023
[2] Roy, Diana, "China's Growing Influence in Latin America," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 15, 2023

cars to dishwashers to defense-related materials. If we look at Latin America as a *liability* instead of an *opportunity*, we will continue to concede the region to the PRC and Russia. We must consider Latin America the new frontier for securing our supply chains in industries like semiconductor manufacturing, while adding value to economies that will give people in the region a reason to stay home and participate in the global economy. Diversification of our semiconductor supply chain means diversification of our critical mineral sourcing. As the Western Hemisphere is home to some of the largest critical mineral reserves in the world, especially in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, and Peru, the United States must work with these countries to secure critical supply chains and help these democracies close their credibility gap.

But to close the credibility gap for democracies in Latin America, there must be a strong defense of democratic institutions that respect human rights. That also means the United States closing its own credibility gap to show that our Cold War-era approach of undermining democracy in the region is over. From Arbenz to Allende to Goulart to many others, the United States, under the misguided leadership of American policymakers like Henry Kissinger, undermined what could have been a longstanding and strong democratic tradition in the hemisphere. There is no gray area here: The United States must forge a new strategy in the region that prioritizes democratic institutions, anti-corruption, and human rights as a condition for receiving the full backing and support of the United States Government.

That was why I felt it was so important for the United States to stay engaged in the democratic transition of power in Guatemala when it was threatened in December 2023. With Representatives Castro, Ramirez, and 17 additional members of Congress, I authored a letter to Secretary of State Blinken to express concern following unprecedented actions taken by the Guatemalan Public Prosecutor's office and others to deny the will of the Guatemalan people and prevent President-elect Arévalo from taking office on January 14th after winning a free and fair election. 70 years after the United States overthrew Guatemala's democracy, the Biden Administration made clear that its commitment would be to the Guatemalan people. The administration deserves praise for understanding interests in the long- and short-run are only aided by seeing robust democratic institutions grow in Guatemala that can fight corruption, establish the rule of law, and deliver for the people of Guatemala.

As Vice President, Joe Biden made 16 official visits to the region, more than any other president or vice president.[3] By establishing the root causes strategy and the America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity to signal that the United States is back after four years of unilateral withdrawal under the Trump Administration. While U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere has been often damaging and counterproductive, including our support for corrupt, anti-democratic regimes during the Cold War, we must reverse the trajectory of Trump Administration policies that echoed that inglorious past, and consistently ground our policy towards the region in supporting democratic institutions, anti-corruption efforts, and human rights.

[3] Christian Paz, "The Biden Doctrine Begins with Latin America," *The Atlantic*, October 26, 2020

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nicholas and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Meeks (No. 1 to No. 71),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
Recent proposals to eliminate 33 Special Envoys and Special Representatives at the Department of State, including the Special Envoy for Racial Equity and Justice, Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons, and Special Envoy for International Labor Affairs. What message does this action send to governments across the hemisphere about the United States' commitment to democracy and labor rights globally?

Answer 1:

Recent proposals to eliminate Special Representatives that advocate for the fundamental rights and support the participation of members of historically marginalized communities undermines our credibility in the global arena as we work to promote democracy and inclusive growth. This action damages our bilateral relationships with countries that share our values, makes it easier for countries to open the door to malign actors, and calls into question the United States' commitment to promoting a diverse, inclusive, and prosperous hemisphere.

Question 2:
How do your respective bureaus and missions across the Hemisphere coordinate with the Secretary's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to advance DEIA?

Answer 2:

Advancing national security interests requires an agile, talented workforce leveraging America's diversity as a force multiplier. President Biden affirmed in his 2021 National Security Memorandum, "We must prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as a national security imperative, in order to ensure critical perspectives and talents are represented in the national security workforce."

WHA values and continuously strives for greater diversity and inclusion to address complex, multi-dimensional foreign policy challenges and threats in a diverse hemisphere. Throughout our recruitment and retention efforts, WHA strives to ensure everyone in its workforce feels welcome, heard, and that their contributions to the bureau's national security mission are valued.

Bureau leadership recognizes the reality of systemic barriers facing underrepresented groups in the region and commits to taking concrete

actions towards eliminating them. WHA's DEIA Council works to institutionalize DEIA in the bureau, including by supporting Department-wide diversity goals, initiatives, and strategies.

WHA established a dedicated DEIA Senior Advisor position in 2021, demonstrating our commitment to put diversity strategies into action. The Senior Advisor provides guidance and programming to DEIA councils established in every embassy and consulate. The Senior Advisor collaborates with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (S/ODI) to share our bureau's inputs, feedback, and experience with Department DEIA initiatives. The Senior Advisor coordinates closely with our Race, Equity, and Social Inclusion (RESI) unit on our equity agenda within the Western Hemisphere.

Question 3:
What resources are required to advance DEIA priorities?

Answer 3:

Advancing DEIA priorities requires a multifaceted approach that hinges on several key resources. First, financial investment is crucial to support initiatives such as cross-cultural training programs, regional workshops, hiring strategies focused on diverse talent pipelines, and the development of inclusive policies. The bureau must allocate resources for comprehensive diversity audits and assessments to identify gaps and measure progress. Additionally, dedicated personnel or teams are essential to drive DEIA strategies, implement policies, and foster a culture of belonging. These teams often include DEIA officers or councils that collaborate across the region to ensure that equity and inclusion are integrated into all aspects of bureau operations.

Educational resources play a pivotal role in advancing DEIA priorities. This includes providing ongoing education and training opportunities for staff at all levels to enhance awareness, sensitivity, and understanding of

DEIA issues. Such opportunities may include workshops, seminars, and access to research.

Technology resources, such as data analytics tools, are essential for tracking diversity metrics, identifying disparities, and measuring the impact of DEIA initiatives. By leveraging these resources effectively, the bureau can foster environments where diversity is celebrated and equity is ensured.

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. Countries in the Caribbean face among the highest homicide rates in the world, including due to a worrying proliferation of violence perpetrated by gangs and armed groups. Recent data suggests that the average rate of violent deaths in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region is nearly triple the global average. The region also faces one of the world's highest rates of violent deaths among women.

Question 4:
How is the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative calibrating to address the rising threat of gun violence and illicit arms traffickroing, including from the United States?

Answer 4:

Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, the United States is supporting Caribbean countries in: adoption of MOUs allowing the use of the ATF eTrace system to help identify alleged gun traffickers and initiate criminal firearms investigations; implementing the Caribbean Firearms Priority Actions and Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, including creating national action plans on firearms; utilizing the CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit (CGIU) to assist Caribbean law enforcement authorities with criminal investigations, prosecutions, and intelligence exchange; and supporting interagency vetted units focused on addressing illicit firearms. These efforts support Caribbean countries' investigation and prosecution of illicit firearms trafficking.

Question 5:
How could this initiative better respond to the increasing threat of sexual and gender-based violence?

Answer 5:

The culture of impunity associated with violence against women contributes to societal attitudes that limit women's participation in social, economic, and political life. The prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) is obscured by underreporting due to lack of confidence in the security and justice sectors, fear of retribution, and social stigma. Under CBSI, INL and USAID help build Caribbean criminal justice sector and civil society capacity to address and prevent violent crime, including GBV.

USAID's CBSI programming addresses the increasing threat of GBV through comprehensive support for judicial, health, and social services, to enhance the recovery and empowerment of victims. By strengthening institutional capacity, launching behavior change campaigns, and improving coordination among civil society and government entities, USAID programs aim to mitigate the consequences of violence, ensure effective access to justice, and promote long-term societal change to reduce GBV.

In addition to CBSI, J/TIP programming in the Dominican Republic works to address the risk of trafficking and revictimization by preventing, protecting, and prosecuting TIP cases and ensuring access to TIP specialized shelters, comprehensive support services, and compensation. Programing aims to increase access to SOPs for trauma-informed, victim-centered identification, referrals, and service provisions for shelter staff, government actors, and civil society; provide capacity-building training opportunities for TIP stakeholders and government actors; and collaborate with the Ministry of Women to support a specialized TIP shelter in Santo Domingo.

Question 6:
How are we responding to address the Caribbean's specific needs, including climate adaptation and energy security? What specific assistance programs does the U.S. Agency for International Development offer to Caribbean countries?

Answer 6:

The United States has provided nearly $100 million in new resources to increase access to climate finance, accelerate the transition to renewable energy, and build resilience to climate change and natural disasters through the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030). Under PACC 2030, USAID's $20 million Caribbean Climate Investment Program unlocks private sector investment in renewable energy and climate adaptation across the region. USAID's $6.1 million Caribbean Resilient Economies and Sectors activity helps reduce barriers to public and private finance to build climate and disaster resilience and supports climate smart practices in critical sectors, like agriculture.

To strengthen Caribbean capacity to deploy clean energy projects, the State Department's Bureau of Energy Resources' Power Sector Program (PSP) delivers regional webinars, workshops, and trainings in

partnership with the Caribbean Electric Utility Services Corporation and the Organization of Caribbean Utility Regulators. PSP provided technical assistance on renewable energy procurement, regulatory frameworks, grid development, and power system planning to Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Question 7:
How has the Administration engaged with Caribbean countries to support investment and trade and what successes has the United States had in implementation of the strategy? How has the Administration engaged partner governments to respond to natural disasters?

Answer 7:

The Administration has reinvigorated programs like the Caribbean Basin Initiative (which offers duty-free access to the U.S. market) and the U.S.-Caribbean Community Trade and Investment Council, which builds momentum for worker-centered trade and intellectual property protection while highlighting U.S. private sector investment – with notable success in Guyana's natural gas sector. USAID provides humanitarian assistance after natural disasters and strengthens disaster resilience through economic development and capacity-building programs. U.S. EXIM has increased its portfolio in the Caribbean substantially and its CEO has visited the Caribbean on multiple occasions. In partnership with the Interamerican Development Bank, we have promoted efforts to build resilience and transition to greater use of renewable energy.

Question 8:
How many people have been impacted by initiatives under Central America Forward in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and how does the Administration measure success of the initiative?

Answer 8:

The Partnership for Central America – Central America Forward's (CAF) implementing organization – measures the impact of companies' commitments through: financial inclusion and access to capital; skilling and workforce development; job creation; digital access; food security and climate adaptation; and advancing entrepreneurs and small businesses.

CAF investments have impacted millions across the region, to include: bringing more than 2.5 million people into the formal economy; reaching over 1 million learners with training programs on entrepreneurship, digital and financial literacy, skills for employment, and women's empowerment; and generating more than 70,000 new jobs across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Through private sector engagement under CAF, we have seen improvements in labor conditions and stronger business practices in support of the rule of law.

Question 9:
How does the Administration incorporate feedback from civil society and labor organizations to ensure participating companies are in compliance of with the initiative's goals and objectives?

Answer 9:

Prior to joining Central America Forward, each company is thoroughly vetted to ensure alignment with U.S. interests and Root Causes Strategy priorities, particularly regarding human rights, labor rights, anti-corruption, and the environment, as outlined in the Good Governance Good Jobs Joint Declaration. Feedback from civil society, labor organizations, or other entities is reviewed by the Department. In 2023, the Partnership for Central America launched a Regional Civil Society Council to incorporate feedback and shape its programming under Central America Forward. The Department routinely interacts with participating companies and responds seriously to behavior outside of U.S. interests.

Question 10:
More broadly, how is the Administration working to implement its Root Causes Strategy?

Answer 10:

The Root Causes Strategy (RCS) implements programming and policy initiatives that address the immediate and long-term drivers of irregular migration. The RCS seeks to foster a prosperous and safe Central America, where people advance economically, live, work, and learn in safety and dignity, contribute to and benefit from the democratic process, have confidence in public institutions, and enjoy opportunities to create futures for themselves and their families at home. Our efforts are particularly focused on populations most likely to migrate and the issues that the people of Central American countries report as key motivators for migration. Good governance, rule of law, and human rights are integral to ensuring lasting, inclusive results. The strategy's implementation methodology supports community-based interventions and includes collaboration with host governments, civil society, the private sector, and international partners to increase opportunities in countries of origin and reduce the likelihood that individuals choose to migrate.

Question 11:
What is the Administration's view on prospects for peace in Colombia?

Answer 11:

While the Administration supports the pursuit of peace in Colombia and President Petro's desire to address ongoing threats from insurgent, terrorist, and drug trafficking groups, the outcome of the Colombian government's negotiations with armed groups remains uncertain. The United States has no role in any ongoing negotiations. The United States remains focused on full implementation of the 2016 Peace Accord and on ensuring criminals are held accountable for their actions. These are fundamental steps to achieving lasting peace in Colombia.

Question 12:
How is the Administration adjusting its cooperation with Colombia to address rising levels of violence in the country?

Answer 12:

The murder rate in Colombia dropped in January-June 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. This follows a murder rate reduction in 2023 over 2022. Still, addressing violence in Colombia remains a concern, and our longstanding cooperation and assistance programs have helped reduce violence. We take a multifaceted approach to address violence stemming from transnational criminal organizations, illegal armed groups, and other sources by working closely with the national police, military, congress and other entities. We collaborate on counternarcotics efforts, implementation of the 2016 Peace Accord, rural development, human/civil/labor rights, security cooperation, and rule of law programming, among many others. INL-constructed rural police stations resulted in a 30-45 percent homicide reduction in nearby conflict-affected rural municipalities, and INL will continue work to enhance CNP presence, and community trust in police, in conflict-affected rural areas.

Question 13:
How is the State Department engaging indigenous groups and civil society in Colombia to incorporate their priorities in our bilateral engagement with Colombia? What are specific examples?

Answer 13:

In October 2022, the Secretary announced the United States would become the first "international accompanier" to the Ethnic Chapter of the 2016 Peace Accord. Since then, the U.S. government has supported Indigenous and Afro-descendant members of civil society to advance their visions of peace and inclusive development, in addition to collaborating with the Colombian government to implement the Ethnic Chapter. Another key avenue of cooperation with civil society is the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality (CAPREE), signed in 2010, which seeks to elevate the recognition of their cultures and incorporate their voices in both Colombia and in the United States. Additionally, in November 2023, the State Department created the Indigenous Youth Leadership Coalition (IYLC) as a new network to elevate the voices of Indigenous youth in global civic and political participation conversations. The participants, including one from Colombia, attended the White House Tribal Youth Forum alongside Native American youth leaders to share

perspectives with U.S. policy makers on critical issues such as preserving Indigenous knowledge and languages, climate resilience, and health. Since its establishment, Embassy Bogota has supported the IYLC initiative and robust participation of Indigenous youth.

Question 14:
How do these changes fit into the Administration's overall approach to U.S.-Cuba relations?

Answer 14:

U.S. policy toward Cuba focuses on support for the Cuban people, including their human rights, fundamental freedoms, and their political and economic well-being. We are proud of the many steps we have taken to support the Cuban people.

We removed Cuba from the annual Not Fully Cooperating Countries list due to the factual circumstances related to the Colombian President's peace initiative and the criteria for inclusion in that list, not as part of a broader initiative related to Cuba.

The regulatory amendments Treasury issued in May advanced the Administration's efforts to support the continued growth of independent private sector entrepreneurs in Cuba and increase the range of internet services available to the Cuban people. We believe that growth of the private sector is Cuba's only hope for generating economic development and employment to improve the standards of living for the Cuban people.

Question 15:
Does the Administration plan to make any additional changes to U.S.-Cuba policy?

Answer 15:

We do not have further changes to announce at this time. The Administration will continue to support the Cuban people and advance U.S. interests regarding Cuba.

Trilateral Fentanyl Committee and firearms trafficking: Earlier this year, the Canadian, Mexican and U.S. governments expanded the scope of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee to also include firearms trafficking and committed to developing a trilateral report to document cross-border firearms seizures in all three countries.

Question 16:
How will this inform our decision-making when it comes to countering both fentanyl and firearms trafficking?

Answer 16:

Firearms trafficking fuels transnational criminal organizations' ability to operate with impunity and expand illicit drug distribution. A broadened strategic trilateral understanding of the corridors and methodologies used for trafficking drugs and firearms and the criminal organizations involved will help shape collective efforts and actions by each country to disrupt the illicit movement of firearms, precursor chemicals, and fentanyl across borders.

International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) Assistance. While the FY 2025 budget request for INCLE assistance for Mexico increased over FY 2023 levels, overall INCLE requests for Mexico have dropped since FY 2021.

Question17:
How does the State Department measure success of U.S. INCLE assistance to Mexico in addressing the fentanyl trade?

Answer 17:

The Department reviews data from implementing partners to determine if projects funded through INCLE assistance are advancing our objectives in addressing the fentanyl trade. Project indicators include improved targeting and information sharing and increased training and capacity building among law enforcement partners. In addition to INCLE assistance, the Department uses diplomacy, multilateral fora, and rewards and sanctions tools to influence our partners in Mexico to address the fentanyl trade.

Question18:
How could current assistance programs be made more effective?

Answer 18:

Sharing data is key to creating a common language for informed

discussions on the synthetic drug challenge. At the seventh North American Drug Dialogue meeting, the three countries shared initiatives to standardize data repositories, for example, on weapons tracing and drug toxicology. Assistance programs are made more effective when designed in partnership with host governments with a commitment to measure the impact of cooperation against shared threats and invest in sustained capacity to disrupt transnational crime.

Question 19:
In light of recent elections in Mexico, will the Administration consider reevaluating our assistance to Mexico to better address the fentanyl epidemic in the wake of the election?

Answer 19:

The Department continuously looks for ways to improve the impact of assistance on our most pressing synthetic drug threats. We welcome opportunities to deepen cooperation with the current and incoming Mexican administration to address fentanyl.

Question 20:
What steps have you taken to accelerate friendshoring in partnership with countries in the Caribbean and more broadly across the hemisphere?

Answer 20:

Through the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity and in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), we work with partners in Barbados, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere in the region to identify opportunities to strengthen regional supply chains in key industries such as semiconductors, clean energy, and medical supplies, through targeted competitiveness studies and information sharing.

Together with the IDB, the State Department unveiled at the Americas Partnership Foreign Affairs Ministerial the CHIPS ITSI Western Hemisphere Semiconductor Initiative. This groundbreaking initiative, supported through the CHIPS Act International Technology Security and Innovation (ITSI) Fund, enhances semiconductor assembly, testing, and packaging (ATP) capabilities in partner countries, beginning with Mexico, Panama, and Costa Rica.

We support economic development and cross-border collaboration with our Caribbean partners through initiatives focused on promoting inclusive growth and job creation through entrepreneurship and small business development. With the State Department's support, on July 16 the Small Business Administration hosted a Startup Nations Ministerial in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where government leaders from across the region gathered to discuss ways the public sector can support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and entrepreneurs.

We support small businesses across the Western Hemisphere through the Small Business Network of the Americas, in which we help our partners develop, strengthen, and connect a global network of MSME assistance programs to drive increased collaboration, sharing of best practices, and open market access for MSMEs across borders by implementing the proven U.S. Small Business Development Center (SBDC) model.

Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose Fernandez participated in the U.S.-Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) Joint Consultative Dialogue on Supply Chains between

the United States, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Panama. The dialogue advanced our countries' collaboration to strengthen supply chain resiliency in the health sector through concrete actions.

The Undersecretary met with senior leadership from the Dominican Republic to deepen economic cooperation, advance the Dominican Republic's leadership in the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, and promote the Dominican Republic's role in critical supply chains. He has engaged with private sector leaders to promote opportunities for U.S. companies in partner countries and help them overcome challenges in the region. In the Dominican Republic, the U.S. Embassy has worked with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to increase participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially women-owned businesses, in global value chains.

Question 21:
How do these efforts support the American consumer?

Answer 21:

Through these efforts, we help improve American consumers' access to secure, trusted sources of critical goods and services. We also promote people-to-people ties throughout the Western Hemisphere through connections forged between small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Question 22:
What does the Administration see as the greatest threat to Democracy from within the region? From outside?

Answer 22:

Rather than manifesting as a single threat, the challenges facing democracy in the Americas are complex and mutually reinforcing. The Western Hemisphere has faced longstanding poverty, discrimination, inequality, corruption, and crime. COVID-19 compounded these issues, and populations across the Americas began to doubt democracy's effectiveness. Malign states such as the PRC pose the primary external threat to democracy, subverting the region's democratic institutions by facilitating the spread of dis- and misinformation and enabling authoritarian regimes through diplomatic and financial cooperation.

Question 23:
How will the Voluntary Working Group address these challenges?

Answer 23:

The Voluntary Group employs dialogue, cooperation, and information sharing among OAS Member States and civil society partners to protect democracy. The Voluntary Group Work Plan identifies four primary axes of focus: democracy and human rights; democracy, integral development and combatting poverty; promotion of democratic culture; and strengthening and preservation of democratic institutions. Proposed activities to enact this Work Plan include anti-discrimination awareness campaigns, convening expert meetings on transparent governance, and analyses of poverty-reducing economic models.

Question 24:
What is the Administration's approach to advancing human rights in countries committing violations in the name of advancing their own national security, particularly when dual nationals are involved?

Answer 24:

The Administration believes that enduring solutions to violence and insecurity require a criminal justice system that shows respect for due process and human rights. The Department of State has no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens at home and overseas. We do not draw a distinction between dual nationals and those who solely hold U.S. citizenship.

Democratic backsliding threatens hard-won gains that made the Western Hemisphere the world's most democratic region. We will continue to advance U.S. national security priorities in the hemisphere, including promoting accountability for individuals who seek to undermine rule of law and democracy.

Sanctions and visa restrictions are a key part of our toolkit. We use them to promote accountability and dissuade future acts of corruption, undemocratic actions, and human rights violations and abuses.

Question 25:
What are the USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean? How are USAID programs in El Salvador working to support rule of law and those detained by Bukele's "State of Exception"?

Answer 25:

USAID views civil society and other private actors—nongovernmental organizations, journalists, universities, faith groups, labor unions, community organizations, business entities—as essential building blocks of democracy and development.

USAID's new DRG Policy reaffirms and renews USAID's commitment to democratic governance and human rights by outlining approaches for enhancing the effectiveness of the United States' support for democratic development.

Under the interagency Voices initiative, USAID works with the State Department and like-minded partners–governments in the region and the international community, civil society, the private sector, and others—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America.

USAID has consulted closely with organizations to better understand risks they're facing and increased programming in Central America to meet some of these challenges to respond directly to the regional trends impacting civil society organizations and independent media and to concerns our partners have raised.

- An example of this is a new suite of regional activities that aim to strengthen cross-border networks of independent media and civil society to expose corruption and offer medium-term protection for democracy activists, human rights defenders, and anticorruption champions from northern Central America and Nicaragua with fellowship opportunities at U.S. universities.

USAID has a robust portfolio that promotes rule of law, transparency, and human rights. We provide ongoing support to document and file complaints related to the State of Exception (SOE) and support families that have been negatively impacted by the SOE. We help strengthen people-centered justice services for victims of crime and people accused of

crimes; strengthen the investigative capabilities of public defense and provide legal aid services; and build civil society capacity to monitor judicial independence and transparency. Given the context, we work primarily with civil society, independent media, and a select group of independent government institutions.

We are poised to engage with the Salvadoran government should there be meaningful steps to re-introduce due process guarantees, release individuals wrongfully arrested, and rehabilitate and reintegrate those formerly detained. Until that happens, we are working with the government in a limited way on juvenile justice issues and with communities on the resolution of disputes and disturbances outside of the formal justice system and channeling at-risk youth towards more positive behaviors.

Question 26:
What are funding priorities for civil society in Nicaragua - where the Ortega regime has quelled opposition, including by expelling and revoking citizenship of his critics - and in Haiti, where the country has not held elections since 2016?

Answer 26:

Funding priorities in Nicaragua align with the Department's policy to support democratic leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, and independent media working to increase accountability of the Ortega-Murillo regime, advance democratic restoration efforts, and ensure Nicaraguan citizens have access to credible information online.

Free and fair elections are a precursor to accountable and transparent governance in Haiti. Priorities include the meaningful inclusion of civil society, including women, youth, and those living outside of the capital, which is an integral part of our 10-Year Plan for Haiti under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.

Question 27:
How does the Administration work to ensure the rights of the indigenous are protected in U.S. funded security operations in the hemisphere?

Answer 27:

On his first day in office, President Biden issued Executive Order 13985 on *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*. The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs carries out E.O. 13985 through championing the social inclusion of all marginalized populations, including Indigenous communities, to help democracies deliver for all individuals.

The United States is committed to advancing human rights and protecting all civilian populations when providing security assistance to foreign countries and international organizations. State Department assistance strictly adheres to the Leahy law, which prohibits the U.S. Government from using funds for assistance to units of foreign security forces where there is credible information implicating that unit in the commission of gross violations of human rights. When an entire unit is designated to receive assistance, the State Department thoroughly vets the unit and the unit's commander. The Department continuously monitors

and considers any derogatory information that implicates security forces, or units that potentially committed gross violations of human rights.

Additionally, the President issued a National Security Memorandum, approving a revised U.S. CAT Policy (NSM-18) on February 23, 2023. The updated CAT Policy elevates human rights in the arms transfer decision-making process and recognizes that U.S. foreign policy and national security interests are best advanced by working with trusted actors who will use arms transfers responsibly and who share U.S. interests.

Question 28:
How can the United States work with CARICOM to increase its capacity to fulfill its critical mission?

Answer 28:

The United States collaborates with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its 15 members on challenges of mutual concern in the Caribbean region. Under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), the State Department works to build the capacity of CARICOM's "security cluster" institutions, such as the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and the Regional Security System. CBSI funding supports IMPACS' efforts to advance counter-firearms trafficking coordination and investigations via the CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit.

In the area of climate resilience and energy efficiency, the State Department's Power Sector Program delivers regional capacity-building workshops benefitting Caribbean energy regulators and electric utilities, in partnership with the Caribbean Electric Utility Services Corporation and the Organisation of Caribbean Utility Regulators. USAID supports the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre and strengthens regional institutional capacity through the provision of climate data and data

management tools and technical assistance to organizations involved in the development and execution of climate projects.

Question 29:
What progress has been made to advance the Caribbean Firearms Trafficking Priority Actions developed under the auspices of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI)?

Answer 29:

CARICOM Heads of Government formally adopted the Priority Actions in 2019. Subsequently, CARICOM and the United Nations developed the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, which provides timelines and baselines for implementing the Priority Actions. To date, eight Caribbean countries have approved national action plans to implement the Roadmap. In 2023, U.S. and Caribbean authorities convened a CBSI firearms trafficking technical working group meeting, where they affirmed commitments to implement the original 30 Priority Actions and identified 18 additional actions.

Question 30:
How will the United States process asylum applications at legal points of entry?

Answer 30:

We refer you to DHS for information on the processing of asylum applications at the U.S. southwest border.

Question 31:
What steps has the Administration taken to facilitate legal pathways to migration pursuant to the 2022 Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection?

Answer 31:

Individuals seeking international protection and other lawful pathways into the United States have many options, including refugee resettlement, humanitarian parole, family reunification, labor pathways, and seeking asylum in host countries, as well as various other support services provided by international organizations and NGOs. Individuals have accessed safe and lawful pathways and information available at no cost to the applicants through Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Guatemala. Thousands of individuals have already completed the full security vetting process and arrived in the United States.

Question 32:
Can you explain how Safe Mobility Offices work and their role in promoting safe, orderly, humane and regular migration?

Answer 32:

Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) operate in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Ecuador. SMOs, through the MovilidadSegura.org website, facilitate access to protection and other lawful migration pathways to the United States and other countries. The Safe Mobility initiative is part of the Administration's holistic approach to promote safe, orderly, and humane migration management. In addition to expanding lawful pathways, this holistic approach also includes supporting solutions to displacement through regularization and integration programs to allow refugees and vulnerable migrants to remain where they are, so they do not have to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. southwest border.

Question 33:
What resources are required to expand their impact and reach? How does the State Department coordinate with USAID to align resources and share information to avoid redundancy in programming?

Answer 33:

Migration is inherently linked to economic, development, humanitarian, and peace and security issues. Continued funding to support humanitarian and development assistance will make it possible for millions of refugees, vulnerable migrants, and other displaced persons in the region to integrate into host communities or resettle in safer environments. The Department coordinates closely with USAID to support programming complementary to the Safe Mobility initiative, such as increasing long-term integration and access to lawful labor pathways in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Question 34:
How is the State Department working with governments, civil society and private sector in the northern triangle – Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – to collaboratively address the root sources of migration?

Answer 34:

The U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration tackles the drivers of irregular migration through diplomatic engagement supported by foreign assistance programs and private sector investment through the Vice President's Central America Forward initiative. Strong relationships with governments, civil society, and the private sector are fundamental to this mission. The Administration has made concerted efforts to expand partnerships, particularly with civil society and the private sector, to complement the work of governments in Central America through the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

Question 35:
What is the overall impact and what are the long-term benefits you anticipate from the Administration's current approach?

Answer 35:

The U.S. Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration in Central America aims to generate sustainable living conditions for all people throughout the region. The strategy promotes hope and opportunity for the people of Central America to build better futures at home. The Administration's approach promotes stronger and more inclusive economic growth, greater respect for the rule of law and human rights, and improved security and safer communities, all contributing to reduced emigration. We have already seen promising results related to key drivers – lack of economic opportunities, for example – and related to migration numbers and intent to migrate from the region.

Question 36:
What challenges does the State Department face in the region and how responsive are your partners to addressing these gaps?

Answer 36:

Challenges to inclusive economic growth and democratic governance in the region include corruption, gang violence, illicit drug flows, poor economic conditions, and in several countries, increasingly authoritarian governments. Despite these challenges, we continually find ways to work with likeminded partners, including governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector, to advance creative responses to these challenges. For example, since 2021, Department of State assistance helped nearly 500 people in Central America return to work following threats and attacks related to their civic work, enabling them to protect critical civic space. Our diverse partners in the region are active and willing to advance our mutually shared interests, even in challenging environments.

Question 37:
What is the Administration's short-term response to the regime's continued exploitation of migrants through Nicaragua?

Answer 37:

No one should profit from the desperation of vulnerable migrants – not smugglers, and certainly not public officials, governments, or authoritarian regimes. The Department's visa restriction policy under 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), enacted in 2023 and expanded in 2024, covers owners, executives, and/or senior officials of charter flight companies, ground and maritime transportation companies, travel agencies, and tour operators, who provide transportation and travel services designed primarily for travelers intending to irregularly migrate to the United States. Our early efforts in the Caribbean helped reduce certain charter flights to Managua that were transporting irregular migrants. We seek to expand that success.

We continue to engage the private sector and governments worldwide to eliminate this exploitative practice. On May 15, the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and the Treasury jointly issued a Policy Alert on Disrupting Irregular Migration to notify airlines, air charter

operators, travel agents, and service providers of U.S. government efforts to promote responsible practices in the industry, prevent and disrupt illicit activity, and enhance compliance with lawful migration pathways.

Question 38:
How is the U.S. working with other countries in the region to address this challenge?

Answer 38:

The United States has imposed sanctions on various actors for their roles in serious human rights abuses, repression of independent civil society, or corruption that enriches Daniel Ortega, Vice President Murillo, and their cronies. As the United States has repeatedly stressed, the overall goal of sanctions is not to punish but to bring about a positive change in behavior. Ortega and Murillo have not yet shown signs they are willing to change course, so we continue to explore coordinated, multilateral pressure using the diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal.

Question 39:
Please expound on the Administration's vision for future U.S.-Argentine cooperation.

Answer 39:

Argentina and the United States enjoy a positive and mutually beneficial relationship, rooted in shared values and interests. Our people, governments, universities, and business communities all engage in reciprocal exchanges of ideas, perspectives, and information to the benefit of both societies and governments. We believe the United States and Argentina can continue to strengthen cooperation, including to advance the clean energy transition and spur private sector investment.

Our bilateral relationship is based on deeply held shared values, including a strong commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The United States is committed to strengthening our friendship and cooperation with Argentina as we work together to increase trade, tourism, and people-to-people ties.

Question 40:
How is the Administration balancing its deepening cooperation with the Milei administration while supporting civil liberties in Argentina?

Answer 40:

The United States and Argentina share a deep commitment to supporting democracy, labor rights, and human rights. We have held bilateral human rights dialogue in both February 2023 and in April 2024, and labor dialogues in both May 2023 and June 2024, with the purpose of deepening our cooperation to protect human rights in our own countries and abroad. We believe responsible nations must not shrink from scrutiny of their human rights record; rather, they should acknowledge it with the intent to improve. When all people – regardless of their race or ethnicity – are free to live up to their full potential, our collective security is strengthened.

Question 41:
To what extent, if at all, has the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva proven receptive to cooperating with the United States on regional and global challenges, including the crises in Venezuela and Haiti, Russia's war in Ukraine, and climate change?

Answer 41:

We recently celebrated 200 years of diplomatic relations with Brazil, our hemisphere's second largest democracy and an important partner. President Lula and President Biden share many of the same top priorities. For example, on workers' rights, both presidents launched the Partnership for Workers' Rights in September 2023 to advance the rights of working people around the world and champion an agenda of fairness and sustainability. Together our administrations have begun implementing activities that strengthen the Partnership and build trust between our governments and workers. The presidents also agreed last year to reinvigorate the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promote Equality (JAPER). JAPER aims to advance equity for marginalized racial and ethnic communities, including people of African descent and Indigenous communities, by identifying opportunities for collaboration and sharing best practices. U.S.-Brazil engagement on

climate and environment focuses on minimizing deforestation and related illegal activities, clean energy, and supporting low-emissions agriculture. President Lula pledged to end deforestation in the Amazon by 2030 and our assistance – through USAID, the Amazon Fund, the LEAF Coalition, and other efforts –

contributes to this goal.

On Venezuela, President Lula continues to play a crucial role as he has publicly called on Maduro to allow for a competitive and inclusive election on July 28. Regarding the Essequibo territorial dispute with Guyana, Lula helped to de-escalate tensions between Venezuela and Guyana through mediated discussions between the countries hosted by CARICOM. Lula has stated that Brazil wants to help Haiti. In February, Brazil co-hosted a Multilateral Security Support (MSS) mission donors' event on the margins of the G20 Foreign Ministers Ministerial at which the international community pledged more than $100 million. We are working with Brazil to secure additional assistance for Haiti.

Lula has reiterated Brazil's position as a neutral party in Russia's war against Ukraine and has repeatedly called for any peace talks to include

both Russia and Ukraine. We have urged Brazil to support Ukraine's ongoing peace process, encourage Russia to engage in good-faith discussions on negotiated settlement, and hold Russia accountable for its atrocities against the people of Ukraine. While we differ on approaches to resolving the conflict in Gaza, privately Lula has listened to our position. As Secretary Blinken clearly stated in February while in Brazil, we are equally moved by the suffering of people and want to see it end.

Question 42:
How do these budget cuts affect our cooperation with Colombia on security and counter narcotics efforts?

Answer 42:

While the Colombian government has indicated the referenced cut will not impact the defense sector, the Department has consistently urged the government to increase its funding for security, counternarcotics, and rural governance efforts amidst declining budgets in recent years. Colombia continues to be one of the United States' most reliable allies in efforts to counter drug production and trafficking and strengthen the rule of law and improve the capacity of security counterparts throughout the region. INL programming provides crucial support to the Colombian security forces to address capacity challenges on shared priorities like counternarcotics seizures given limited Colombian government resources.

Question 43:
What risk does this budget shortfall impose on Colombia to look to external sources of finance from the PRC?

Answer 43:

At this time, it is unclear how Colombia may address this shortfall or whether Colombia may seek external sources of finance to offset the shortfall, or reduce discretionary spending.

Question 44:
How have congressional reductions in assistance and withholding requirements affected U.S. foreign aid programs in Colombia?

Answer 44:

In the Department's experience, reductions and proposed reductions in assistance levels relative to the President's requests, post-notification expenditure holds, and increased and more stringent withholding requirements generally, complicate our ability to strategically implement foreign assistance programs in support of U.S. national security interests in Colombia.

Question 45:
How has our relationship with the Petro government affected our capacity to advance key U.S. foreign policy objectives?

Answer 45:

Although President Petro's policy priorities may differ from his predecessors', our cooperation with Colombia continues under Petro and generally speaking, our capacity to advance key U.S. foreign policy objectives on security, climate, migration, and peace continues as it did under prior Colombian administrations.

Question 46:
How can we work with the Petro government to see greater progress on interdiction and the reduction of drug trafficking and human smuggling?

Answer 46:

We are already working closely with all levels of the Petro government to increase interdiction results and combat human smuggling, and this cooperation is bearing results. For example, thanks to U.S. assistance, Colombia increased its cocaine seizures by 35 percent from January to June 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. U.S. assistance also enabled Colombia's national police and military to pursue criminal groups that profit from human smuggling, resulting in the capture of drug traffickers and human smugglers, including some of Colombia's most wanted criminals.

INL-supported cooperation with Colombia exports security to the region. The INL-supported Bogota-based Group Against Organized Crime (GCO) co-locates U.S., Colombian, and regional government law enforcement officers and facilitates near real-time intelligence, information exchange, and coordination of drug seizures, migrant smuggling investigations, arrests, and fugitive extraditions.

In May, the INL-supported GCO facilitated coordination between the Ecuadorian National Police and the Panamanian National Immigration Service, resulting in the arrest of an Ecuadorian citizen wanted for migrant trafficking. After discovering the suspect crossed from Colombia into Panama, GCO analysts issued an alert, resulting in the trafficker's identification and arrest at an immigration reception center.

Question 47:
What assistance is the Administration providing to the Ecuadorian government to counter TCOs?

Answer 47:

The Administration, primarily through INCLE programming, provides assistance to Ecuador to detect illegal activity and interdict narcotics that financially support TCOs, reduce narco-violence, and prosecute TCO actors. In February 2024, as Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, I traveled to Ecuador to deliver tangible pragmatic wins across these three areas. INL supports the promotion of security through a whole-of-society approach, working closely to recruit and train an elite border police unit, which I inaugurated during my visit. I also announced $2 million in additional funding to support priority community projects in areas that are hotbeds for narcotrafficking and related violence. Further, INL also assists Ecuador in prosecuting TCOs: in December 2022, Ecuador inaugurated the Specialized Court for Corruption and Organized Crime, which, in its first year of operation, issued 165 convictions, including against high-profile TCOs such as Tren de Aragua and Los Choneros. I also chaired the welcome

ceremony for seven new judges assigned to this Specialized Court during my visit.

Question 48:

How is the Administration ensuring that U.S. assistance does not contribute to human rights abuses by Ecuadorian security forces?

Answer 48:

The Government of Ecuador is proactively messaging on its commitment to operate within legal frameworks and protect human rights. The Embassy, including INL leadership, continues to meet with high level contacts in the Noboa administration, including the police, Ministry of Interior, and armed forces, to reiterate the importance and necessity of protecting human rights. We continue to closely monitor the situation and take every allegation seriously to ensure the protection of human rights in the country.

Ongoing INL programming and advisory services work to ensure Ecuadorian security forces are protecting human rights, including meaningful engagement with communities and non-discriminatory policies and procedures as they work to meet growing security concerns.

Question 49:
What role does Guatemala play in addressing the root causes of migration strategy?

Answer 49:

As the largest economy in Central America, Guatemala plays a key role in addressing the root causes of migration. Together, we share the priority of responsibly managing migration to provide access to safe, humane, and lawful pathways, while simultaneously addressing the root causes of irregular migration, including economic, governance, citizen security, corruption, and human rights challenges, along with gender-based violence. The Root Causes Strategy aims to improve conditions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras so citizens in those countries do not feel compelled to leave their homes and undertake the dangerous journey north. On March 25, Vice President Kamala Harris announced the United States intends to provide $170 million for development, economic, health, and security assistance for Guatemala, subject to Congressional notification. This foreign assistance supports the Root Causes Strategy and aligns with key priorities of the Arévalo administration so Guatemalans can build a

more secure, prosperous, and democratic future in their home communities.

While we know the factors driving people to migrate are complex, we see encouraging signs that this strategy works. We saw a 30 percent decrease in the number of Central Americans at the southwest border from FY 2021 to FY 2023, and a double-digit decrease in Central Americans' intention to migrate in a similar period. Guatemala hosts one of four Safe Mobility Offices in the region; these offices increase access to information about lawful migration pathways to the United States, Spain, and Canada.

Question 50:
What are positive examples of cooperation on addressing migration and addressing citizen security?

Answer 50:

We are proud to stand with Guatemala as a democratic partner committed to the rule of law and responsive governance that delivers tangible results for people. We have partnered to transform our hemisphere's approach to the historic migration challenge. Guatemala's hosting of the third Los Angeles Declaration for Protection and Migration Summit in May 2024 is just one of many recent examples of this partnership.

In FY 2023, U.S. government programming promoted the sustainable reintegration of nearly 150,000 returned migrants to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The United States provided post-arrival assistance (such as hygiene kits, food, clothing, and transportation) to nearly 78,000 returned migrants, and reintegration services (such as training, job placement, and psychosocial support) for nearly 27,000 individuals.

We support Guatemala in its efforts to promote a safe, secure future for its citizens. In January, the U.S. embassy and the Indigenous municipality of Santo Tomás Chichicastenango, Guatemala, signed an arrangement to

improve access to justice and specialized care for victims of gender-based violence, and strengthen citizen security. U.S. support for Guatemalan police helped channel corruption cases to investigative units, thereby resolving more than half the backlog of complex cases. The United States trained more than 4,000 justice sector personnel in northern Central America, giving citizens greater confidence that perpetrators will be held accountable.

For example, in FY 2023, the United States and the Arévalo government collaborated to dismantle 12 local gang cliques in Guatemala City. The United States also developed comprehensive crime pattern reports, which helped execute 14 search warrants and 21 arrest warrants, resulting in cases brought against the alleged offenders and seizure of firearms, ammunition, and more.

Question 51:
What new opportunities do you foresee for U.S.-Mexico cooperation with the incoming Sheinbaum administration?

Answer 51:

President-elect Sheinbaum and her team have signaled a desire for Mexico to remain a strong ally and a committed partner of the United States to continue our joint efforts to reduce irregular migration, stem the flow of illicit drugs, and promote the integration of North American supply chains. With the new administration we will reinforce the value of our existing bilateral architecture to achieve these shared goals, including the USMCA, the Bicentennial Framework, border coordination mechanisms, and our high-level economic and security dialogues. We have an important opportunity to enhance bilateral security cooperation, building on President-elect Sheinbaum's pledge to reduce criminal impunity by strengthening Mexico's investigative and intelligence capabilities. We also want to continue our vital work with Mexico to boost North American prosperity and leverage the historic near-shoring opportunity, while expanding access to clean energy and confronting the climate crisis.

Question 52:
How does the Administration plan to advance key U.S. interests, including stopping the flow of U.S-bound fentanyl, managing irregular migration, and advancing economic integration through the United States-Mexico-Canada Free Trade Agreement?

Answer 52:

The Administration is strengthening efforts with Mexico to disrupt precursor chemical supply chains and synthetic drug trafficking through information-sharing, forensic chemist exchanges, private sector collaboration, and international agreements. We will also work to jointly expand maritime and port security and enforcement, reinforce capabilities to dismantle and investigate clandestine laboratories, and strengthen Mexico's investigative and prosecutorial capacity for fentanyl cases.

The United States and Mexico work together as partners to advance our shared migration goals under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. Following several cabinet-level meetings with Mexico since December, the Mexican government increased efforts to stem irregular migration. Migrant encounters at the U.S. southern border fell by 57 percent over the last six months, from 301,982 encounters in December to 130,419 in June.

We work with Mexico to address root causes of irregular migration, identify lawful pathways to migration, and foster humane management of borders and ports to prioritize our shared security. In FY 2023, through PRM, we provided nearly $87 million in humanitarian assistance to partners in Mexico to support refugee protection, people seeking asylum in Mexico, and vulnerable migrants.

We are advancing economic integration with Mexico through the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA), our High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED), and border cooperation mechanisms. Under the USMCA, we established a process to maintain North American trade flows during emergencies, settle trade disputes, and champion workers' rights through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) to address denials of labor rights. Under the HLED we are advancing supply chain integration, promoting regulatory harmonization, and training our workforces for the industries of the future. Under our border mechanisms, we are modernizing border infrastructure to facilitate secure, licit trade and further integrate our economies.

Question 53:
What are the Administration's top priorities for working with incoming President- elect José Raúl Mulino of Panama? How likely is bilateral cooperation on the repatriation of migrants transiting through Panama?

Answer 53:

We work closely with Panama to curb irregular migration, reinforce our security cooperation, combat narcotrafficking and corruption, and promote inclusive economic development. Together, the United States and Panama continue to strengthen humane migration management systems by promoting lawful pathways and holding accountable those individuals who exploit vulnerable migrants and recklessly encourage them to undertake a perilous journey through the Darien jungle. Since his May 5 election, President-elect Mulino has been clear regarding his intent to curb irregular migration through the Darien jungle and we look forward to partnering with him closely on efforts to promote safe, orderly and regular migration.

Question 54:
How does the proposed constitutional amendment impact the independence of judicial authorities in Peru and the legitimacy of future elections?

Answer 54:

The proposed constitutional amendment would replace Peru's National Justice Board (JNJ) with a new entity called the National Magistrate School (ENM). The ENM would select, train, promote, and dismiss judges and prosecutors, subject to significant congressional oversight. Peru's senate, which will be re-established with Peru's return to bicameralism in July 2026, would have the power to remove any ENM board member for "serious misconduct."

Similarly, this legislation would give Peru's senate the authority to appoint and dismiss for "serious misconduct" the heads of the National Bureau of Electoral Processes (ONPE) and the National Identity Registry (RENIEC), two autonomous electoral entities. These positions at ONPE and RENIEC are currently filled by the JNJ. The ONPE organizes Peru's elections and the RENIEC oversees Peru's voting registries.

The constitution committee of Peru's congress moved this legislation to the plenary on June 5. As a constitutional reform, the bill must be approved in two successive sessions of congress under Peruvian law. Peru's new congressional session begins August 4, and the constitutional amendment would have to be approved during this session and again in the subsequent session, which begins March 1, 2025. If the legislation passes both sessions of congress, it could go into effect before April 2026 elections. Further implementation of the constitutional change requires congress to draft, pass, and implement additional legislation to create the ENM, dissolve the JNJ, and govern the ONPE and RENIEC.

Currently, Peru's judicial and electoral institutions operate largely independent of congressional oversight. Congressional control of previously autonomous judicial and electoral bodies could lead to their politicization and impact the legitimacy of Peru's judicial system and elections.

Question 55:
How does legislation seeking to modify the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation (APCI) impact civil society's operations and capacity to speak out against government actions?

Answer 55:

Legislation to modify Peru's Agency for International Cooperation (APCI) would greatly increase government oversight of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Peru. It also would give Peru's congress the power to appoint the heads of the APCI, which is housed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

If passed, the bill would require APCI approval of NGO use of international donor funding, allow APCI to enforce a system of penalties – including significant fines and cancellation of an NGO's registration – and put in place burdensome registration and reporting requirements. The language of the legislation is vague, which leaves it open to broad interpretation and potential politicization. The legislation could be used to target specific NGOs with fines, or with suspension or cancellation of their registration.

On June 5, the foreign affairs committee moved the APCI legislation forward to the plenary, but it has not been brought forward for a vote. If Peru's congress passes the bill in its next session, it would then go to President Boluarte for approval.

Question 56:
What is the Administration's assessment of these legislative proposals?

Answer 56:

The State Department continues to monitor these concerning legislative proposals and their potential impact on rule of law, good governance, and civic space. Healthy democracies require independent institutions, laws with clear guidelines that are applied equitably, and a robust civil society. When enacting constitutional and legislative reforms, we will continue to urge Peru's congress to consider a variety of viewpoints and consult with those most impacted by the legislation. We hope any unintended consequences of Peru's pending legislation, such as its potential susceptibility for use as a political tool, will be carefully considered.

Question 57:
What role are independent observers and regional leaders slated to play in Venezuela's elections? How has U.S. support for election observers been affected by restrictions on U.S. democracy and human rights assistance?

Answer 57:

The UN sent a panel of experts to Venezuela for election observation. By agreement with Maduro representatives, the UN will share the report of findings post-election privately only to select UN officials and Maduro representatives, unless the UN Secretary General determines it can be released to the public. The Carter Center has also sent a small team of observers to monitor election integrity. Maduro representatives disinvited the EU's monitoring mission, which inhibits the effectiveness of overall monitoring as the EU's team would have been substantial and would have provided a consistent presence in voting locations.

Question 58:
How will the Administration respond if the July 28 presidential election is held under undemocratic electoral conditions or if Maduro is considered to have won by fraudulent means?

Answer 58:

Independent electoral observers will be on the ground to monitor the voting and tabulation processes and will use a proven "quick count" methodology that should provide one useful way to assess the credibility of the election results. We have asked likeminded members of the international community to stay in touch in the coming days both before and after the July 28 election. We will work with others in the international community to make a careful assessment of the integrity of the process, including the timely release of accurate results, and respond to the situation in a coordinated way.

Question 59:
What are the main goals and activities of the Countering PRC Influence Fund in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Answer 59:

The main goals and activities of the Countering PRC Influence Fund in Latin America and the Caribbean include: combatting PRC practices that facilitate critical supply chain monopolization by creating new opportunities for the private sector to compete for critical resources in PRC-monopolized markets; countering PRC predatory lending and investment and other corrupt practices that allow control of strategic infrastructure and technology by building capacity of governments in the region to implement transparent and equitable procurement processes and regulations; countering PRC approaches and models related to cybersecurity and cyberspace by providing assistance that promotes best practices for cybersecurity; and combating disinformation by developing expertise on PRC issues among policymakers, academics, civil society, and journalists.

Question 60:
How can these funds better support companies in the hemisphere to adopt U.S. technology?

Answer 60:

Countering PRC Influence Funds (CPIF) can support adoption of U.S. technology by building capacity of governments in the region to support the development and implementation of technology standards while highlighting risks of adopting PRC technologies. Funds can amplify the economic benefits of creating an open, interoperable, secure, and trusted information and communications technology sector. Projects funded through CPIF can include acquisition of U.S. technologies and equipment as part of the implementation.

Question 61:
How is the Administration working to ensure U.S. companies can compete in the region, freely and fairly?

Answer 61:

As the largest trading partner in the region, the United States promotes sound, transparent policies that protect the rule of law and provide an attractive business environment for the private sector. With allies and partners, we offer higher-standard and transparently procured and governed infrastructure investment alternatives that uphold labor, environmental, and social safeguards and foster inclusive growth aligned with international best practices. Through the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, we are working to boost the competitiveness of the Western Hemisphere, enhance protections for our workers and our climate, make our supply chains more resilient, and spur high-standard, sustainable infrastructure investment.

Question 62:
What are the main challenges to U.S. interests posed by PRC's activities in the Western Hemisphere today?

Answer 62:

On security, the proliferation of PRC-linked telecommunications and surveillance equipment highlights risks to national security, human rights, and privacy, especially with the threat of increased authoritarianism in the region. On the economic front, we focus on ensuring competitive and transparent investment environments that help level the playing field for U.S. companies. The Department works to counter PRC propaganda and disinformation campaigns in the region. With seven of Taiwan's 12 official diplomatic partners located in Latin America and the Caribbean, we remain focused on countering the PRC's campaign to induce these countries to switch recognition and squeeze Taiwan out from multilateral organizations.

Question 64:
How are PRC's activities perceived by the region's governments and civil societies?

Answer 64:

In many WHA countries, governments and publics are waking up to the downsides of PRC investment and interference. Beyond well-documented substandard infrastructure developments, many PRC-backed projects have been accused of or investigated for corruption, labor violations, and environmental hazards. While PRC infrastructure projects are viewed with growing skepticism, we see little sign these recurring issues have deterred governments in the region from accepting investments from PRC companies.

Question 65:
What has the Argentine government shared about the inspection's findings?

Answer 65:

The Government of Argentina conducted an inspection of the Chinese Deep Space Station in Neuquén in mid-April, after numerous discussions with U.S. officials. We can provide more details on the outcome of this inspection in an appropriately classified setting.

Question 66:
How is the Administration collaborating with the Milei administration to ensure greater oversight over the PRC-controlled facility?

Answer 66:

The PRC currently operates its Chinese Deep Space Station (CDSS) facility in Neuquén with little visibility from the Argentine government. The Milei administration stated they intend to "review the contracts" that led to the CDSS's construction. We work with the Argentine government to increase transparency and oversight of PRC activities at this site.

Question 67:
In your assessment, how has Russia's war in Ukraine affected Russian diplomatic relations across Latin America?

Answer 67:

We encourage and partner with WHA countries to support Ukraine and its people as they defend themselves against Russia's war. We remain vigilant to Russia's attempts to project its political and military influence. Twelve WHA countries attended the Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland; Chile, Argentina, and Canada attended at the leader level. Twelve WHA countries signed on to the joint communique that supported peace rooted in the UN Charter, including three that were unable to send in-person representation to the Peace Summit.

Question 68:
What actions or policies is Russia pursuing to advance its interests in the region and to support allies such as Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela?

Answer 68:

We monitor the activities of malign actors like Russia and Iran in Venezuela and work to protect U.S. interests in the region. We raise concerns with our allies and partners regarding Russia's threats to increase military cooperation with Venezuela. We closely monitor the Kremlin's support for Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, including through military cooperation, dissemination of disinformation, high-level visits to the region, and financial backing.

Question 69:
How concerned are you about reports that Russia plans to conduct military exercises in the Caribbean in the coming weeks?

Answer 69:

As part of Russia's regular military exercises, we anticipate that this summer Russia will conduct heightened naval and air activity near the United States. These actions will culminate in a global Russian naval exercise this fall. Russia will temporarily send combat naval vessels to the Caribbean region and likely to other parts of Latin America. There may also be some aircraft deployments or flights in the region. Russia's deployments are part of routine naval activity, and these deployments pose no direct threat to the United States.

Question 70:
Some analysts have asserted that Iran's engagement in Latin America strengthened during the administration of recently deceased Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi. What evidence have you seen to support that assertion?

Answer 70:

Raisi did indeed seek to bolster political and economic ties to select countries in Latin America. This was partially evidenced during his travel to Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba in June 2023. The Bolivian president and his Iranian counterpart also met in early March 2024. In July 2023, Iran and Bolivia signed a memorandum of understanding to "expand bilateral cooperation in the field of security and defense." We continue to work together with partners and allies to counter Iran's destabilizing activities worldwide.

Question 71:
What steps is the Administration taking to curb future Iranian involvement in the region?

Answer 71:

We increased actions to counter Iran, including its efforts to expand its influence in Latin America, through a range of tools at our disposal including sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and consistent engagement and coordination with our partners in Latin America regarding Iran's broader influence operations and the threat it poses to the region.

We informed partners that entities and individuals that provide support, including maritime services, to designated entities could be subject to sanctions risk under U.S. authorities, and therefore urged caution when engaging Iranian military vessels.

Questions for the Record for Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean Michael Camilleri
Submitted by Ranking Member Gregory Meeks
Full Committee Hearing: "Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere" Hearing Date: June 12, 2024

Question:

Inclusion and U.S. foreign policy. We know that when we focus on issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, including through the rights of women and girls, afro- descendants like the Garifuna, and Indigenous peoples, we strengthen democracy and demonstrate U.S. values on a global stage, contrasting the PRC's development approach.

How is USAID prioritizing inclusion, including through the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment, as a focus of foreign policy in the hemisphere?

Answer:

USAID recognizes that empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality are crucial in order to successfully advance human rights and realize effective and sustainable development outcomes in the countries where we work. Similarly, we understand that every individual and every community, of all diverse identities and experiences—including Afro-descendent, Garifuna, and Indigenous people—is instrumental in the transformation of their societies. USAID integrates these guiding principles into everything we do, including our workplaces and our programming.

Programming across the Latin American and Caribbean region is guided by the Agency's policies on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), LGBTQI+ and Inclusive Development, Promoting the Rights of Indigenous People—as well as a host of additional policies (for example on Disability; Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance; and Local Capacity Strengthening) that collectively elevate the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

- In each Mission or Country Office, a Gender Advisor is charged with making sure GEWE principles are reflected in the country or regional strategy, activity design and implementation, solicitations, and monitoring, evaluation and learning as well as in all communications.
- Mission Inclusive Development Advisors are charged with providing in-depth guidance to Mission leadership and staff and helping coordinate and socialize inclusive development efforts to ensure that USAID's policies on inclusive development are integrated in meaningful ways across the Mission's portfolio.
- USAID conducts a country-level Gender Analysis in every country with a Country Office or Mission. The findings and recommendations inform the office or Mission's strategic planning and are integrated across their programming portfolio.
- Additionally, USAID conducts a Gender Analysis for every activity. The Analyses must account for the fact that individuals' gendered experiences are informed by their age, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexual orientation, disability status, and geographic location. Findings from

the Gender Analysis inform every stage of the activity, from design through implementation and evaluation.

- Programming examples:
  - In Honduras, Indigenous people lack full recognition, protection, and enjoyment of ancestral land. Too often, municipal governments fail to engage communities in development planning processes. USAID is funding a three-year activity, **Reducing Conflict through Indigenous Women and Youth in Honduras Activity**, that seeks to strengthen the role of women and youth as peace builders in their communities through common issues of concern – natural resource management (NRM), conflict, and early warning. The Activity partners with Indigenous groups who experience systemic, structural, and physical violence at the local, regional, and national level on common issues of concern. We mobilize women and youth leaders in Indigenous councils at municipal and district levels and provide training and capacity building to develop a collaborative process with multiple border institutions to promote environmental protection.
  - In Haiti, a USAID sponsored survey in 2023 estimated that the total number of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Haiti is 660,000, of which 67 percent are women-owned. Only 10 percent of female business owners have access to formal credit. USAID's **Atteindre activity** supports MSMEs to access credit and savings, enhance their business performance, and create jobs. To date, the activity has supported 6,701 women-led micro-enterprises.
  - USAID's **Haiti Citizen Security Program (HCSP)** is working in some of the most challenging neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince to expand access to critical services for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), in particular for survivors of gang realted sexual violence currently being used to instill fear in local residents. HCSP is mapping and strengthening both the formal and informal referral networks for GBV services and providing grants to local organizations to increase the availability, accessibility, and awareness of GBV services in these communities.
  - In Guatemala, the new **gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Activity** will work to reduce the negative social and economic impacts of GBV through prevention, response, and provision of essential services for victims and survivors. The project will build on local knowledge, increasing awareness and connecting survivors to holistic GBV response services and referral networks. Services provided to GBV and sexual violence victims will use trauma-informed and survivor-centered approaches. The Project will also facilitate economic opportunities and improve livelihoods by making mental health and psychosocial support services available through partnerships with community organizations, the government, academia, and the private sector.
  - In Ecuador, USAID is working with Indigenous organizations and local communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon through the **Sustainable Environment and Livelihoods for a Vital Amazon (SELVA)** project. The project works to strengthen governance systems, reduce deforestation and forest degradation, and improve overall well-being of

communities. USAID is implementing early detection and response mechanisms that allow Indigenous communities to address illegal activities and threats to their forests and is supporting Indigenous peoples and local communities to restore degraded forests.

Question:

What additional resources are required to execute these priorities?

Answer:

USAID is committed to continuing to incorporate the principles of gender equality, women's empowerment, and inclusive development into our programming. A key step toward executing these priorities is ensuring that USAID staff is representative of the diversity of the United States and the countries where USAID serves, to include members of marginalized and underrepresented groups. Resources can be used to recruit and retain such individuals, and to ensure they have a comprehensive understanding of USAID to effectively inform and guide the Agency's work in Latin America and the Caribbean. Additional resources and flexibilities could support USAID staff and implementing partners in deepening their understanding of the principles of inclusive development and the unique regional and national-level dynamics that shape people's lived experience and hinder the full empowerment of women and historically marginalized communities.

Question:

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA): It is essential that U.S. development professionals overseas represent the full diversity of America.

How is USAID's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility working with you to advance DEIA across the bureau and overseas missions across the hemisphere? What are recent examples of success in advancing internally facing reform to promote DEIA?

What resources are required to advance DEIA priorities?

Answer:

USAID's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) works closely with the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to promote DEIA across the bureau and missions in the hemisphere, advancing empowerment, increasing transparency, and promoting career development opportunities. This includes institutionalizing the agency's "5P" plan to advance DEIA through a focus on people, programming, partners, policies, and processes. It also includes technical assistance to Missions related to various aspects of implementing DEIA across operations and programming. For example, in 2023, the Agency DEIA office collaborated with USAID's Caribbean Inclusive Leadership and

Localization Development Initiative at USAID/Jamaica. The Agency DEIA office also coordinates closely with the LAC Bureau on outreach to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Some recent examples of success in advancing internally facing reform to promote DEIA are:

- The elevation of 9 Foreign Service Nationals to the Exception Grade, FSN-13 from 2018 to present.
- The launch of six fellowships at the Mission level since fiscal year 2022 to provide leadership opportunities to young people from marginalized communities.
- The launch of an online Merit-Based Compensation (MBC) course for FSN Performance Management piloted with the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean. This training supports USAID in implementing uniform practices to increase trust and efficacy of its approach to performance management while building confidence and strengthening Mission leadership accountability.
- Increased engagement with MSIs.
    - That engagement includes the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and its members like Florida International University (FIU). USAID and FIU recently extended our Memorandum of Understanding which allows us to create a pipeline to careers in development for FIU students, and to engage FIU's experts on the region. FIU has been brought in to consult on cybersecurity efforts – including a program in El Salvador to train USAID staff, develop curriculum, and outline a security operations center. They also attended co-creation events around an IUU fishing project and received a $4 million award, which is now doing critical work with environmental, economic, and geopolitical impacts, as it works to help the U.S. counter People's Republic of China influence in the region.
        - FIU also serves as a pilot location for USAID's Global Development Lab, which is a space where USAID and FIU grow the next cadre of development professionals by engaging with students and faculty around important development topics.
    - The HACU MOU continues to expand and grow.
        - USAID's Development Diplomat in Resident for the West Coast attended a HACU student leadership event to speak about careers at USAID and within international development.
        - USAID's Senior Advisor to the CDO presented to HACU members on how to become USAID implementing partners and shared other career opportunities for faculty and students at HACU's International Conference in May and via a virtual webinar in June.
    - In 2023, USAID and the U.S. Forest Service launched $2.5 million in small grants that will allow students and faculty in Minority Serving Institutions in the United States and Territories to gain overseas development experience while supporting USAID's global mission.
    - USAID has also signed an MOU with HBCU Alcorn State University to harness Alcorn's expertise and cutting-edge research capabilities in sustainable watershed systems, agricultural research, and climate change analytics. Specifically, USAID aims to bring Alcorn, Caribbean universities, and regional entities together to create linkages and the sharing of information and knowledge.

- USAID also has MOUs with Delaware State University and Tuskegee University.

Sustained resources at USAID are needed to continue the advancements made across the Agency related to creating an inclusive culture free from harassment and discrimination, where all staff, regardless of hiring mechanism, can thrive. We continue to focus on institutionalizing these efforts, both internally and externally. Internal attention is given to: (1) develop inclusive leaders and create internal systems that promote inclusivity throughout the USAID employee life cycle; (2) enable and empower staff participation in initiatives that work toward the betterment of the Agency's efforts in DEIA and actively engage with these groups to operationalize their recommendations and efforts; and (3) achieve strengthened accountability for promoting and sustaining a diverse workforce and an inclusive Agency culture. Related to reducing external barriers, we continue to expand partnerships with new and non-traditional partners, including small and disadvantaged businesses, MSIs and local partners.

Question:

Safe Mobility Offices: Safe Mobility Offices or SMOs across the hemisphere allow migrants the opportunity to determine their eligibility for legal pathways to the United States before arriving at our border. The latest data we received shows that more than 21,000 people have availed of these centers.

How are the State Department and USAID coordinating to align resources and share information to avoid redundancy in programming?

Answer:

The Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) are solely funded by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. While USAID does not fund the operation of the SMOs, USAID coordinates closely with State colleagues to support programming complementary to the Safe Mobility Initiative, such as increasing regularization, long-term integration, and access to lawful labor pathways in Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, in Colombia, USAID, through our partners, works with the Colombian Government to improve their migration response, with a focus on expanding Colombia's capacity to integrate Venezuelan migrants into host communities and improve their access to jobs and key services. We also work closely with municipal governments on migrant integration. City governments are at the forefront of providing migrant access to basic services such as healthcare and education. We know that Colombia's regularization and integration efforts are key for reducing the likelihood of onward migration. As one supporting data point shows, flow monitoring from this April showed that less than 1 in 5 migrants crossing the Darien Gap had a residency permit in a third country, suggesting that regularization and related integration processes are crucial for reducing onward migration, and therefore this type of integration work is essential.

The President's fiscal year 2025 budget request includes approximately $218.7 million in development and economic assistance for hemispheric migration management. Assistance would ensure the Department and USAID can sustain and expand regional migration management efforts, such as

bolstering integration programs necessary to reduce the likelihood of onward migration, reinforcing stability for affected communities, and enhancing access to legal pathways and protection throughout the region. Of the $218.7 million for hemispheric migration, USAID would manage $145.3 million for migrant integration.

In Colombia, USAID supports the Colombian government's continued efforts to regularize Venezuelan migrants and facilitate their long-term integration into host communities. In Peru, USAID supports the Government of Peru to provide regular status to migrants and to facilitate their economic integration through financial inclusion, the validation of professional credentials, and workforce development and entrepreneurial support. USAID also supports efforts to combat xenophobia and discrimination towards migrant populations.

In Ecuador, USAID supports access to information, regularization, and services to facilitate the long term integration of migrants into host communities, with a focus on economic integration and financial inclusion. In Brazil, USAID supports the Government of Brazil's voluntary relocation program (Interiorization strategy) to match migrants with host communities and provide workforce development training, Portuguese language courses, and job placement support to facilitate integration. Through our regional platform, USAID also supports increased regional cooperation in South America through exchanges of best practices and expertise around positive policy developments on migrant regularization and integration.

Question:

Northern Triangle: The Administration's Root Causes Strategy recognizes economic, governance, and security factors drive irregular migration from Central America.

- How is USAID working with governments, civil society and private sector in the northern triangle – Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – to collaboratively address the root sources of migration?
- What challenges does USAID face in the region and how responsive are your partners to addressing these gaps?

Answer:

The Root Causes Strategy (RCS) has brought a new level of attention to Northern Central America (NCA) since the Biden-Harris administration launched it in 2021 and we have used our resources to enable USAID to double down on approaches that work by engaging with NCA governments, the private sector, and civil society.

In Guatemala, USAID continues to support the democratic opening presented by the outcome of the 2023 Guatemalan presidential election with assistance to tackle corruption, promote inclusive and transparent governance at all levels, and strengthen civil society and independent media as essential building blocks of democratic development. USAID engages the private sector to promote trade and

investment, upgrade productive infrastructure, mobilize financial services, and improve private sector competitiveness.

In El Salvador, USAID supports civil society actors who are demanding for democratic accountability, while providing assistance to select government institutions committed to fighting corruption. These include entities such as the Government Ethics Tribunal, the Public Defender's Office, and the National Public Procurement Agency. USAID is also supporting the Government of El Salvador in attracting increased levels of foreign direct investment with the express purpose of creating new jobs, especially in the tech and tourism sectors, both identified as sectors with the greatest potential for economic growth and new job creation.

In Honduras, USAID partners with a wide range of nonprofit and private actors. These companies and organizations range in size, capacity, and geography. USAID also partners with the Government of Honduras at the national and local levels and across all sectors: health, education, governance, and economic development. This deep cooperation between our governments is based on decades of development cooperation across multiple U.S. and Honduran administrations. USAID has achieved notable successes working with these partners across all our programming.

The Vice President's Central America Forward initiative has gathered more than $5.2 billion in private sector commitments to Northern Central America, and USAID has leveraged roughly $189 million from both the public and private sectors (up from the previous year) to increase productivity and incomes for more than 60,000 agriculture industry producers participating in food security programs in Guatemala and Honduras.

The RCS acknowledges the existence of several challenges in the context of irregular migration from NCA, among these:

- Slow economic growth rates, inflation, weak social safety nets, and vulnerability to climate and weather-related shocks have left many Central Americans, particularly women, youth, and marginalized groups, in precarious economic situations. These conditions hamper USAID's efforts to reduce food insecurity, improve health conditions, and strengthen human capital.
- Corruption and mismanagement of public resources in all three countries continue to hinder government revenue generation and investment opportunities, weakening governments' ability to deliver quality essential services to all citizens.
- Rights activists and journalists continue to face enormous pressures and risks to their livelihoods and lives.
- While national homicide rates have decreased in all three countries, other violent and non-violent crimes—particularly gender-based crimes—go unreported and unaddressed, due in part to corruption, impunity, and lack of public trust in police and justice systems.

As Administrator Power has laid out, sustainable solutions to these complex challenges require locally led action. Nevertheless, by working with and through committed local partners, consulting with stakeholders at all levels, collaborating with our interagency counterparts, and embedding flexibility

and robust monitoring and evaluation into our programming, USAID is able to be directly respond to these issues, make adjustments as needed, and ensure progress under the framework of the Root Causes Strategy.

Question:

Caribbean: According to the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in the Caribbean, "the Caribbean region is the United States' 'third border'."

- How are we responding to address the Caribbean's specific needs, including climate adaptation and energy security? What specific assistance programs does USAID offer to Caribbean countries?
- How has the Administration engaged with Caribbean countries to support investment and trade and what successes has the United States had in implementation of the strategy?
- How has the Administration engaged partner governments to respond to natural disasters?

Answer:

Through the U.S. Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030), established in 2022, the United States supports the Caribbean to increase access to climate finance, accelerate the transition to renewable energy, and build resilience to climate change and natural disasters. For example, USAID's regional Energy Sector Reform program works with partners across the region to improve utility performance and reduce policy, regulatory, and legal constraints to private investment in clean energy. Additionally, USAID's Caribbean Climate Investment Program (CCIP) facilitates private sector investment for renewable energy, energy efficiency, natural climate solutions, and climate adaptation projects by providing access to finance, de-risking instruments, and lending products to climate finance seekers. USAID also supports the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs) to accelerate climate action and access to finance by strengthening regional institutional capacity through the provision of climate data, data management and modeling tools, and technical assistance. To support food security, USAID's Caribbean Agricultural Improvement and Production Activity (CAPA) promotes sustainable agricultural practices to increase fruit and vegetable productivity and improve domestic and regional market linkages for smallholder farmers.

USAID actively engages with Caribbean countries to support investment and trade through a strategy focused on inclusive growth and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) capacity building. In the Eastern and Southern Caribbean, USAID empowers MSMEs, particularly those owned by women and other marginalized groups, by providing business growth seminars, advisory services, and capital access initiatives to help them overcome barriers to finance and formalization. Collaborating with national governments and private sector stakeholders, USAID strengthens legal and regulatory frameworks, promotes private sector growth in disadvantaged areas, and improves job opportunities for disadvantaged populations. USAID regularly aligns its programming with CARICOM's goals and facilitates ongoing public-private dialogue to ensure initiatives benefit all member states. Barbados and the Dominican Republic are both inaugural members of the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP), which builds on existing free trade agreements, trade preference programs, and

other forms of U.S. partnership in the Western Hemisphere to advance projects, collaborations, and policy alignment designed to drive concrete results in terms of regional competitiveness. For example, startup enterprises from both countries will participate in USAID's Americas Partnership Accelerator, alongside complementary efforts from Canada and Uruguay, to provide them with the capital, knowledge, and networks they need to innovate, grow their businesses, and create jobs.

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance's (BHA) has invested significant resources in building operational capacity in disaster response and preparedness for local first responders, local organizations, and government officials throughout the Caribbean. For example, BHA has built long-term relationships with and provided training, technical support, and exercises for key disaster management agencies in each country and in the region. For example, USAID's partner the World Food Programme supports the regional disaster management capability of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and CDEMA participating states with training on emergency telecommunications, end-to-end humanitarian supply chain management, and the enhancement of early warning systems. USAID also supports pre-positioning of emergency logistics equipment including generators, first aid kits, and security lighting throughout the Caribbean with logistics staff seconded to CDEMA to provide further training and simulation activities. These investments in preparedness continue to pay dividends. For example, following Hurricane Beryl, USAID worked directly with the national disaster management authorities in Jamaica, Grenada, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to conduct quick assessments of urgent needs and rapidly deliver humanitarian assistance, including plastic sheeting and shelter kits from USAID's warehouse in Miami.

Question:

Colombia, Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Accord. We see the 2016 peace accord as a critical vision for peace, particularly the Ethnic Chapter which the United States supported from its earliest days alongside a range of leaders in Colombia and the United States and are concerned by rising levels of violence and slow progress of implementation of the Ethnic Chapter.

The Biden Administration has made unprecedented levels of investment in promoting the rights of Afro-descendants, recognizing the importance that human rights and inclusion plays in fostering democracy, security and stability. Can you please describe these efforts?

Answer:

USAID takes a comprehensive approach to address the structural barriers affecting Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous Peoples. USAID both co-leads the interagency Ethnic Inclusion Working Group to advance implementation of the Ethnic Chapter and leads the donor cooperation Ethnic Chapter Sub-group. During Fiscal Year 2023, 11 USAID-funded activities contributed to the advancement of human rights, economic inclusion, and security for Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous Peoples.

The Responsive Governance Activity worked with the Office of the Vice President of Colombia to

develop a strategy and coordinate with other USAID activities and international donors to streamline processes and facilitate actions to advance the Ethnic Chapter. The Colombia Transforma Activity also provided technical support to the Vice President's office, as well as the Association of South Pacific Municipalities, and the Agency for Territorial Renewal, to finalize 12 strategic Nariño Pacific region projects, thereby augmenting Government of Colombia efforts to fund peace investments in Nariño. Colombia Transforma also supported 29 initiatives to strengthen the role of Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous Peoples as key actors in collaboratively implementing the 2016 Peace Accord's Ethnic Chapter. For example, in the department of Nariño, the Activity supported the Afro-Colombian Network of Community Councils to lead training to increase knowledge about the Ethnic Chapter and empower decision-making about peace investments.

Furthermore, the Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombian Empowerment Activity (IPACE) supported institutions from the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition established by the 2016 Peace Accord to advance the implementation of the Ethnic Chapter. IPACE supported the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to bring truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition to two regions, and supported 83 ethnic conflict victims in preparing judicial proceedings. IPACE also provided the National Land Agency with seven topographical surveys to adjudicate land claims for ethnic communities, establishing one Afro-Colombian community council and one Indigenous collective territory.

The Inclusive Justice Activity supported 154 Afro-Colombian community councils in eight departments to strengthen their knowledge and practices around ancestral justice, support strategic litigation to protect ethnic rights, provide judicial representation for communities, and to promote dialogue and agreements between ethnic Afro-Colombian authorities and the judicial branch. Inclusive Justice also partnered with six Afro-Colombian associations to participate in the documentation and processing of fourteen high-impact cases in Afro-Colombian territories. These cases relate to issues such as reparations from the Government of Colombia, protection of Afro-Colombian leaders, rights to water and sanitation, and rights to ethnically appropriate education. Favorable rulings in these cases have resulted in, for example, promotion of voting rights by establishing voting stations in Afro-Colombian communities, provision of authority to Afro-Colombian community councils and midwives to register births, and issuance of an exception to compulsory military service for a member of an Afro-Colombian community council.

USAID, in partnership with the U.S. Embassy's Public Diplomacy Section, also continued its support for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Program, in alliance with a network of nine bi-national centers across the country, supporting 190 Afro-Colombian and Indigenous undergraduate and emerging leaders to continue their English language learning, community involvement, and leadership development as part of a two-year scholarship. The Fulbright Scholarship Activity, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Fulbright/Colombia, provided four scholarships to outstanding Afro-Colombian and Indigenous university students and young professionals to access graduate opportunities in the U.S. Additionally, through the Pacific in Progress Activity—implemented by Colombian organization *Manos Visibles*—USAID enabled 75 Afro-Colombian and Indigenous emerging leaders to attain master's degrees through scholarships co-funded by two highly-ranked private universities in Colombia. The Activity also supported over 500 Afro-Colombian and Indigenous high

school students in four municipalities to plan for their future, and provided mentoring sessions to help them take the next step in their personal and professional development.
Recognizing the dual issues of ethnic identity and gender, the Weaving Lives and Hope Activity strengthened Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women's organizations in the Northern Cauca and Montes de María regions to commercialize their products (handicrafts, coffee, cacao, etc.) and connect them to regional and national markets. In addition, the Generating Equity Activity helped change behaviors and norms around gender-based violence related to racial inequity. For example, in the municipality of Tumaco, Generating Equity worked with Afrimucpaz, a women's association, and 16 community councils in the Pacific Region to create community schools and develop curricula for gender and Afro-masculinity studies.

In February 2024, USAID launched *Raíces,* an opportunity exclusively for Colombian organizations focused on supporting the self-determined development of Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous Peoples and anticipates making multiple awards to support peacebuilding and sustainable development. USAID/Colombia prioritizes the advancement of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities within its operations as well. USAID/Colombia is currently hosting its second cohort of eight Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Young Professionals to both provide them with professional development opportunities and benefit from their knowledge and experience to make USAID's programming with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities more effective.

Question:

How is USAID adjusting its cooperation with Colombia to address rising levels of violence in the country?

Answer:

USAID has adjusted its approach at both programmatic and operational levels to cope with security challenges experienced in some of Colombia's regions.

At the programmatic level, USAID, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Section and the Department of Defense, is supporting a Government of Colombia interinstitutional whole-of-government initiative aimed at addressing the security challenges facing the Cauca region in particular. Historically, Cauca has been a stronghold for illegal armed groups and is currently experiencing increased violence—including forced recruitment of Indigenous children by illegal armed groups—due to the March 20, 2024 suspension of a ceasefire with dissident guerrilla group *Estado Mayor Central* in the Cauca, Nariño, and Valle del Cauca regions.

In response, the Government of Colombia developed *Misión Cauca*, a plan to regain control of strategic areas in Cauca. This plan involves strengthening police and military capacities while promoting socio-economic development initiatives to provide rural populations with licit economic opportunities and prevent youth from being forcefully recruited by illegal armed groups. The Ministry of Defense is leading this plan, with joint efforts from other Government of Colombia institutions such as the

National Planning Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Land Agency, and the National Roads Institute, as well as local private sector and civil society organizations.

USAID's role in this endeavor has been multifaceted, and includes:

- Supporting the Government of Colombia to adopt a comprehensive view of security that acknowledges its connection to development, thereby involving civilian institutions at the national and local levels in addition to the Colombian armed forces;
- Engaging local authorities, including Cauca's Governor, mayors, and Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and rural leaders, in the planning process from the outset; and
- Aligning 12 USAID programs in Cauca with the plan, particularly in the following areas: land titling, productive activities to provide alternatives to illicit economies, support for rural roads development, strengthening of social organizations that prevent human rights violations in Cauca, empowerment of Indigenous women artisans and producers to increase their incomes, and support for youth entrepreneurship and employability as a means to create safe spaces and prevent forced recruitment.

Similar endeavors are taking place in other areas affected by increasing violence, such as the Pacifico Nariñense and Catatumbo regions.

At the operational level, USAID continuously monitors security conditions across the country. With USAID's support, implementing partners continue to adjust programmatically and operationally to reduce their physical footprint in some rural areas when required by security conditions. USAID's support to implementing partners includes the following:

- Providing open-source information and facilitating security information sharing at national and regional levels to aid decision-making;
- Offering in-depth training to implementing partners to mitigate rising security risks; and
- Processing branding and marking waiver requests to reduce risks to implementing partners and program participants.

Question:

Human Rights. Promoting human rights is a pillar of democracy and critical to U.S. national security interests globally. Reports that people in the Dominican Republic have become swept up by arbitrary arrests and subjected to horrific conditions in preventive detention continue to be reported, including by dual national Americans. In El Salvador, tens of thousands of people have been detained, many without any access to due process. Indigenous communities across the hemisphere, including the Garifuna, continue to report land seizures and targeting by security forces among other concerns.

What are the USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Answer:

USAID views civil society and other private actors—nongovernmental organizations, journalists, universities, faith groups, labor unions, community organizations, business entities—as essential building blocks of democracy and development.
USAID's new DRG Policy reaffirms and renews USAID's commitment to democratic governance and human rights by outlining approaches for enhancing the effectiveness of the United States' support for democratic development.

Under the interagency Voices initiative, USAID works with the State Department and like-minded partners–governments in the region and the international community, civil society, the private sector, and others—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America.

USAID has consulted closely with organizations to better understand risks they're facing and increased programming in Central America to meet some of these challenges to respond directly to the regional trends impacting civil society organizations and independent media and to concerns our partners have raised.

- An example of this is a new suite of regional activities that aim to strengthen cross-border networks of independent media and civil society to expose corruption and offer medium-term protection for democracy activists, human rights defenders, and anticorruption champions from northern Central America and Nicaragua with fellowship opportunities at U.S. universities.

Question:

How are USAID programs in El Salvador working to support rule of law and those detained by Bukele's "State of Exception"?

Answer:
USAID has a robust portfolio that promotes rule of law, transparency, and human rights. We provide ongoing support to document and file complaints related to the State of Exception (SOE) and support families that have been negatively impacted by the SOE. We help strengthen people-centered justice services for victims of crime and people accused of crimes; strengthen the investigative capabilities of public defense and provide legal aid services; and build civil society capacity to monitor judicial independence and transparency. Given the context, we work primarily with civil society, independent media, and a select group of independent government institutions.
We are poised to engage with the Salvadoran government should there be meaningful steps to re-introduce due process guarantees, release individuals wrongfully arrested, and rehabilitate and reintegrate those formerly detained. Until that happens, we are working with the government in a limited way on juvenile justice issues and with communities on the resolution of disputes and disturbances outside of the formal justice system and channeling at-risk youth towards more positive behaviors.

Question:

What are funding priorities for civil society in Nicaragua - where the Ortega regime has quelled opposition, including by expelling and revoking citizenship of his critics?

Answer:

USAID is the leading donor in the area of democracy programming in Nicaragua. We are committed to supporting Nicaraguans in advancing towards a more democratic country. We support democratic actors who are continuing to make their voices heard in support of the democratic principles and respect for human rights that will be critical to any democratic progress.

To that end, USAID works alongside Nicaraguan civil society to promote democratic freedoms, including through human rights advocacy and documentation of human rights violations; supporting the survival of independent thought through independent media, think tanks, and civil society; and supporting political consensus-building among democratic actors. USAID programming also helps strengthen grassroots, community-level democratic actors engaging in community activism and civic engagement to keep alive a democratic culture and constituency.

Question:

What are funding priorities for civil society in Haiti, where the country has not held elections since 2016?

Answer:

USAID is implementing a five-year program to assist Haitian partner organizations to strengthen key democratic institutions and practices. This initiative includes close collaboration with civil society stakeholders, the media, and government officials to increase trust, security, and inclusive participation in political processes and elections when conditions exist for them to be held. This approach includes enhancing oversight and advocacy by civil society to improve the credibility of electoral and constitutional reform processes; support to Haitian media to improve fact-based reporting on the transition; and informing and strengthening the engagement of Haitian citizens and civil society groups in elections and political processes.

Question:

How does the Administration work through its foreign assistance to ensure the rights of the indigenous are protected in the hemisphere?

Answer:

Through USAID's Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, USAID aims to strengthen engagement with Indigenous Peoples to safeguard against harm and support their development priorities and self-reliance and increase the integration of Indigenous Peoples' concerns across all sectors of USAID's portfolio of investments and promote cross-sectoral development approaches.

For example, in Guatemala, USAID works to reduce barriers in access to justice for indigenous communities, such as by translating a glossary of legal terms into seven Mayan languages to facilitate interpretation in justice sector institutions. USAID is also working with women indigenous leaders to establish community support networks for women and girls who are survivors of violence.

In Honduras, USAID programs build the capacity of indigenous communities, promote traditional leadership structures, and encourage dialogue to mitigate fragmentation across indigenous groups while addressing impunity in human rights violations committed against their communities. Additionally, USAID supports local political participation for indigenous communities— including Lenca, Maya-Chorti, and Garifuna— to promote the full realization of the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental rights of diverse populations, respecting their social and cultural identities, their customs and traditions, and their institutions.

In Colombia, USAID promotes ethnic and social inclusion by supporting ethnic groups' sustainable self-development; strengthening civil society organizations; promoting Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples' human rights; increasing societal respect for cultural heritage and diversity; and raising awareness and respect for ethnic and racial diversity. These activities have a shared goal to help reduce the stigmatization of Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous Peoples, especially in the context of the USG's accompaniment of the Implementation of Colombia's Peace Accords.

In Peru, USAID works with the Government of Peru to implement its policy to end human trafficking, improve legal and protection services for victims, and train justice-sector experts who work with victims, who unfortunately are mostly Indigenous Peruvian women and girls.

In the Amazon, for example, USAID helps to build the capacity of indigenous peoples to better exercise their rights in the face of large-scale infrastructure development and extractive activities that may affect their livelihoods. USAID promotes the incorporation of the rights and interests of indigenous peoples into public and private sector development planning to balance human welfare and environmental conservation.

Question:

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM): The Caribbean Community has played an indispensable role in forging consensus to address shared challenges from security and arms trafficking to addressing the crisis in Haiti. Five CARICOM members recognize Taiwan, a third of the countries that still do so globally.

How can USAID better work with CARICOM to increase its capacity to fulfill its critical mission?

Answer:

USAID actively collaborates and works to build capacity with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its 15 member states on mutual areas of interest, including climate and energy resilience, citizen security, health, and economic development. Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), USAID helps the CARICOM Secretariat to build an evidence base for its member countries' citizen security programming. USAID and the CARICOM Secretariat also co-host an annual technical working group focused on enhancing regional knowledge and best practices in youth crime and violence prevention.
To build capacity on climate resilience, USAID activities support regional assessment and workshops benefitting institutions like the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs) the the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). Activities support regional institutional capacity through the provision of climate data and data management tools and technical assistance to organizations involved in the development and execution of climate projects.

Question:

Localization: In 2021, USAID launched the Centroamérica Local initiative as the vanguard of its localization efforts globally. The initiative empowers local organizations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to design and help execute the assistance they most need to address the most pressing challenges they identify. Congress directed $100

million in both FY 2022 and FY 2023 toward Centroamérica Local and granted flexibilities to USAID to better enable work with smaller local organizations.

What progress has USAID made through Centroamérica Local over the past three years? Please share specific examples of projects and how they were designed to meet community needs.

Answer:

In the first three years of the Centroamérica Local initiative, USAID provided a cumulative total of over $143 million to local organizations in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. In fiscal year 2023, 21 percent of obligations in these three countries went directly to local partners.

A few examples of projects that USAID has implemented as part of Centroamérica Local include:

- **El Salvador - Fundación Rafael Meza Ayau**: USAID is working with the Salvadoran organization Fundación Rafael Meza Ayau to improve the quality of life of families in the municipality of Soyapango - including training 160 small-scale and informally organized businesses to improve and strengthen their business management skills.
- **Guatemala - El Refugio de la Niñez**: This program responds to the need to strengthen protection services for victims of trafficking in persons and unaccompanied migrant children, while also preventing human trafficking and irregular migration in Guatemala. Through this program, the Guatemalan organization El Refugio de la Niñez supports young survivors of violence and human trafficking by providing comprehensive protection services for 70 underage trafficking-in-persons survivors. Between October 2022 and September 2023, legal services offered by Refugio de la Niñez brought 26 individuals to justice for human trafficking and other forms of sexual violence, which accounted for over 60 percent of the country's sentences during that time period.
- **Honduras - Generating Entrepreneurs and Sustainable Synergies- Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo de Honduras**: In response to the challenges facing youth and returned migrants, this activity is working to increase opportunities in communities with the highest crime and out-migration to help integrate youth and returned migrants into their communities. This activity is working to do this through outreach centers that provide violence prevention services, life skill training, computer and literacy training, and self-employment opportunities. These outreach centers have benefitted over 148,000 children and youth.

Question:

Does Centroamérica Local still serve as a model for localization of foreign assistance programming elsewhere? What lessons have you drawn from the initiative so far?

Answer:

The lessons learned from the implementation of Centroamérica Local in these three counties has helped the Agency identify the resources and actions needed to put local communities in the lead. One example is USAID's recent efforts to translate a greater number and wider variety of documents and online resources into languages other than English. This has impacted how USAID approaches localization across the globe. Staff working on Centroamérica Local played a key role in the advocacy and ultimate adoption of this approach to make partnering with USAID more accessible to many local organizations. Since the start of Centroamerica Local, USAID has:

- Translated several documents related to award-making into Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili,
- Released Arabic, French, and Spanish versions of the WorkwithUSAID.gov website which provides potential partners with information on how to partner with USAID, and
- Created a translation program to more easily translate award solicitation documents across the Agency into languages other than English.

Centroamérica Local also helped lay the groundwork for USAID's second regional initiative, the Africa Localization Initiative, which, like Centroamérica Local, builds on existing USAID investments and partnerships to identify opportunities for more locally led development.

Question:

How does this approach compare to that of other countries seeking to increase their influence in the hemisphere?

Answer:

The U.S. Government is a key leader on a global and regional scale in the effort to encourage more locally led development in the countries we work in across the world and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of our allies are working on integrating locally led approaches into their programming, and many of them signed on to the December 2022 Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development. Among those donors who USAID works closely with in Latin America and the Caribbean include Canada, Japan, and Spain.

While competitors such as the PRC have increased their national and subnational engagement throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, they have largely sought to expand their influence through information manipulation campaigns and by providing billions of dollars of official finance commitments to the region. However, in the case of the PRC, the vast majority of these commitments are in the form of non-concessional loans which tend to be negotiated with relatively little transparency which can fuel corruption and disregard for human rights abuses.

Additionally, these projects are rarely, if ever, implemented using local organizations. PRC-affiliated companies often manage and implement these projects with little opportunity for local actors to set their own agenda in driving progress in their communities. By comparison, nearly all of US financing in the region comes from grants and below-market-rate loans, which offer a more stable and sustainable growth path for our partners.

Question:

Democracy Programs: USAID's Democracy Delivers Initiative recognizes that democratic backsliding is prevalent and that newer democracies often need to demonstrate their worth to their citizens through tangible results. It is difficult to consolidate democratic gains when the people of a country don't see any real benefit to their daily lives. USAID has selected the Dominican Republic and Ecuador as key bright spots to receive support through this initiative.

- How does Democracy Delivers tackle help with democratic consolidation in the Western Hemisphere? Does Democracy Delivers serve as a counterpoint to the type of investments the PRC makes in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- As you look around the hemisphere, where do you see further bright spots?

Answer:

Democracy Delivers aims to support progress *across* sectors where engagement can help a government build trust with its citizens and, through that progress, democratic resilience. In the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, USAID's Democracy Delivers efforts have worked to simultaneously address fundamental democratic development issues and encourage further democratic reform.

In the Dominican Republic (DR), USAID's Democracy Delivers efforts have sought to leverage President Abdinader's focus on anti-corruption and economic growth to deepen our bilateral relationship and ensure the U.S. remains the DR's partner of choice. As part of USAID's efforts to advance economic growth and cooperation, USAID Deputy Administrator Coleman traveled to the DR in December, 2023, to launch a new Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation activity to empower small and medium-sized enterprises and women-owned businesses in the DR to capitalize on nearshoring opportunities and strengthen their participation in inclusive international trade. While in Santo Domingo, DA Coleman also joined Development Finance Corporation CEO Scott Nathan to announce a $200 million DFC loan – DFC's largest investment in the Caribbean in 2023 – to Banco Popular Dominicano to support lending to small businesses and women entrepreneurs. The loan will help tackle the large financing gap for small businesses in the Dominican Republic and promote financial inclusion and economic growth, especially for women entrepreneurs.

With $3 million each in funding, USAID/DR has advanced transparency in public infrastructure development and USAID/Ecuador is working to build cybersecurity capacity. In the DR, USAID programming will institutionalize recent expertise on procurement transparency, planning, and project management for the Port of Manzanillo, which has attracted investment interest from the People's Republic of China (PRC). In Ecuador, USG programming will enhance Ecuador's nascent national Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) and overall cybersecurity capacity, improving the nation's cybersecurity and supporting its transition away from PRC domination in telecommunications infrastructure. This builds on prior USAID and State Department initiatives.

In Ecuador, USAID's Democracy Delivers initiative has sought to ensure that communities and civil society play a central role in efforts to combat insecurity, foster improvements in the business climate to attract private sector investment and generate economic opportunity, and improve municipal services that lead to better water, sanitation and health services which are tangible results citizens can see in their daily lives.

To help address the urgent fiscal and energy crisis in Ecuador—and in response to a Government of Ecuador request—with Economic Resilience funding, USAID is working alongside the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) to help structure the government's proposal to access the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). If successful, this facility could unlock up to $1.3 billion in additional concessional financing to address balance-of-payment issues. This is the first time USAID will provide support for access to the RSF facility, and this has been undertaken in coordination with the U.S. Treasury. These and other efforts further position the U.S. Government as Ecuador's credible partner of choice to help them steady their economy. In response to the increase of security incidents and

violence, the Noboa Administration has also requested USAID support in increasing economic opportunities for youth. The private sector is also interested in working alongside USAID to address security concerns. USAID will soon design a new activity addressing labor pathways for youth, building on the successful results-based model USAID implemented using EDGE funds.

In another bright spot in the region, we are closely tracking developments in Guatemala. In Guatemala, the unexpected victory of anti-corruption champion Bernardo Arévalo in the 2023 presidential elections -- in addition to the groundswell of broad-based citizen activism to ensure respect for the election results -- signaled a concrete shift to a more positive democracy trajectory. Administrator Power attended President Arévalo's inauguration, and USAID has surged support since the start of the new Administration. Additionally, Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan also presents a unique opportunity to counter PRC influence in the Western Hemisphere.

USAID's Democracy Delivers Initiative will continue to mobilize interagency, private sector, philanthropic, and bilateral donor support for countries experiencing democratic openings, recognizing that USAID's resources alone can counter but not offer a full alternative to PRC investments and influence.

Question:

Haitian-Led Development: In the Secretary's words, "Only the Haitian people should determine their own future – not anyone else."

How is the State Department and USAID ensuring that local Haitian civil society, particularly those outside of Port-au-Prince, and women and youth, are meaningfully included as Haiti establishes a new government and lays a foundation for elections?

Answer:

USAID is implementing a five-year program to assist Haitian partner organizations to strengthen key democratic institutions and practices. This initiative includes close collaboration with civil society stakeholders, including those that represent women, youth, groups outside of Port-au-Prince and other traditionally marginalized groups; the media; and government officials to increase trust, security, and inclusive participation in political processes and elections when conditions exist for them to be held. This approach includes enhancing oversight and advocacy by civil society to improve the credibility of electoral and constitutional reform processes; support to Haitian media to improve fact-based reporting on the transition; and informing and strengthening the engagement of Haitian citizens and civil society groups in elections and political processes.

Question:

How has USAID adapted its long-standing programming in Haiti since the significant deterioration of the security situation in the last two and a half years?

Answer:

In response to the increasing gang violence over the last couple of years, USAID has pivoted several programs to meet the changing needs and dynamic operating environment. To support the economic needs created by the instability, USAID redirected funding to support the Caracol Industrial Park (CIP) in Northern Haiti to promote sustained private sector investment, job creation and retention, and productivity at the CIP. In neighborhoods that the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission prioritizes for stabilization, a new economic growth activity will catalyze small and medium enterprises to obtain investment funding to grow and create jobs. USAID will support micro-enterprises and stimulate economic activity in these targeted communities, focusing on vulnerable groups. This effort aims to spur recovery in these neighborhoods, helping to re-establish businesses and small trade activities and create jobs. USAID is also partnering with the Development Finance Corporation to establish several loan guarantee programs to incentivize credit availability, especially for women and youth.

In the health sector, USAID continuously tracks the status of the 170 clinics that we support, monitors commodity stock levels and mobilizes resources as needed to fill gaps and reinforce the health system. This includes work to restore services where breakdowns have occurred, or assure referral sites such as mobile clinics, to reinstate primary health care services. In response to continual shocks and stressors, USAID has strengthened Haiti's health emergency management capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to health threats. This has included: scaling up vaccination; increasing water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions; mobilizing risk communication campaigns to raise awareness and incorporate public feedback into preparedness and response efforts; and expanding treatment center capacities. These efforts have helped Haiti limit the spread of infectious diseases and saved countless lives.

Finally, USAID has redesigned education programming to incorporate new learning methodologies, including online learning and radio broadcasting, to disseminate educational materials when schools are closed.

Question:

As USAID is an implementer of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) strategy, what GFA programs do you have with partners on the ground in Haiti that seek to prevent drivers of instability in such a key neighbor country?

Answer:

To implement the GFA strategy, USAID launched a five-year citizen security activity that builds the capacity of Haitian citizens and institutions to reduce gang violence by connecting police, communities,

and social services to make measurable improvement in the safety and security of Haitians in targeted communities. The activity includes three components: 1) community–based police assistance that strengthens the Haitian National Police capacity to respond to citizen needs, thereby increasing citizen engagement and trust in police; 2) support for community development projects in targeted neighborhoods to collectively identify, plan for, and solve problems, improve their neighborhoods, enhance community safety, and reduce community participation in gangs; and 3) provision of social services for at-risk populations and survivors of violence.

Question:

Democracy and Civil Society: Administrator Power has noted that U.S. leadership should promote a "revolution of dignity to people seeking to be free."

How does that vision extend to USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Answer:

USAID views civil society and other private actors—nongovernmental organizations, journalists, universities, faith groups, labor unions, community organizations, business entities—as essential building blocks of democracy and development.

USAID's new DRG Policy reaffirms and renews USAID's commitment to democratic governance and human rights by outlining approaches for enhancing the effectiveness of the United States' support for democratic development.

Under the interagency Voices initiative, USAID works with the State Department and like-minded partners–governments in the region and the international community, civil society, the private sector, and others—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America.

USAID has consulted closely with organizations to better understand risks they're facing and increased programming in Central America to meet some of these challenges to respond directly to the regional trends impacting civil society organizations and independent media and to concerns our partners have raised.

- An example of this is a new suite of regional activities that aim to strengthen cross-border networks of independent media and civil society to expose corruption and offer medium-term protection for democracy activists, human rights defenders, and anticorruption champions from northern Central America and Nicaragua with fellowship opportunities at U.S. universities.

Question:

In particular, what are the funding priorities for civil society in Nicaragua - where the Ortega regime has quelled opposition, including by expelling and revoking citizenship of his critics - and in Haiti, where the country has not held elections since 2016?

Answer:

USAID is the leading donor in the area of democracy programming in Nicaragua. We are committed to supporting Nicaraguans in advancing towards a more democratic country. We support democratic actors who are continuing to make their voices heard in support of the democratic principles and respect for human rights that will be critical to any democratic progress.

(SBU) To that end, USAID works alongside Nicaraguan civil society to promote democratic freedoms, including through human rights advocacy and documentation of human rights violations; supporting the survival of independent thought through independent media, think tanks, and civil society; and supporting political consensus-building among democratic actors. USAID programming also helps strengthen grassroots, community-level democratic actors engaging in community activism and civic engagement to keep alive a democratic culture and constituency.

USAID is funding activities to improve the oversight and advocacy by civil society organizations in relation to the upcoming elections. Civil society oversight and advocacy (leading up to elections) will increase independent scrutiny and in turn, the credibility of the electoral process. The initiative will ensure greater citizen participation and/or report where citizens were blocked or deterred from participation in the political process. A corollary to the activity's work with civil society is to strengthen the electoral institutions themselves and their capacity to implement inclusive elections and a peaceful transition of power.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
In recent years, there have been challenges in importing Chilean Sea Bass from the waters surrounding the South Georgia island in the South Atlantic following the Russian Federation's decision to impede decisions on catch limits under the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

What is the Department of State's assessment of the Russian Federation's actions in this dispute? What are you doing to address the situation?

Answer 1:

Since Russia blocked CCAMLR's adoption of a conservation measure establishing catch limits and other requirements for the toothfish fishery in Statistical Subarea 48.3 in October 2021, the Department has pressed for Russia to join consensus on science-based measures for this fishery. Our efforts include multilateral diplomatic engagement in CCAMLR meetings and technical conversations with Russia in the CCAMLR Scientific Committee about the science associated with the fishery. In the CCAMLR Scientific Committee, the United States commissioned a thorough, independent scientific review of CCAMLR integrated toothfish assessments in Subarea 48.3. The United States subsequently considered the conclusions of the

independent review panel and, where appropriate, worked to incorporate the panel's recommendations into the Scientific Committee workplan. This review took full account of all issues Russia raised about the toothfish fishery and debunked them. Nevertheless, Russia persisted in its refusal to join consensus to set reasonable catch limits for this fishery. We intend to continue to urge Russia to join consensus on adoption of a science-based conservation measure for limiting catches taken by the toothfish fishery in Subarea 48.3.

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by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
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Question 2:
US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has said that "President Biden does not believe corporations should receive special tribunals in trade agreements that are not available to other organizations, and he opposes the ability of private corporations to attack labor, health, and environmental policies through Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)"

Does the State Department share the President's position of opposing Investor-State Dispute Settlement policies?

Answer 2:

The Department supports President Biden's commitment to a worker-centered trade policy that grows the American middle class, creates new and better jobs, and benefits all Americans, not only those for whom the economy is already working. The Department does not believe corporations should receive special tribunals in trade agreements that are not available to other organizations, and it opposes the ability of private corporations to attack labor, health, and environmental policies through ISDS.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
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Question 3:
What is your assessment of El Salvador's fiscal outlook? Are there reforms you expect them to make to get access to IMF or other international assistance?

Answer 3:

The government of El Salvador is grappling with economic challenges related to food affordability, liquidity, and reducing spending on subsidies. The IMF has signaled that El Salvador will need to make fiscal adjustments, including budget cuts, to qualify for an IMF program, and that addressing risks arising from Bitcoin as legal tender is a key part of ongoing discussions. At his June inauguration, President Bukele previewed Salvadorans might need to take "bitter medicine" to help improve El Salvador's fiscal outlook.

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Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
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Question 4:
In your testimony, you discuss the Inter-American Development Bank's $3.5 billion capital increase and the need for the United States, which is the bank's largest shareholder and most influential member, to invest in the bank. China is not a member of the bank but it has a minuscule share. If the United States does not participate in this capital increase, other countries – including China – still intend to participate.

What does that do to the relative stake of the United States and China in the bank? Would choosing not to participate be an effective way of confronting China's influence in the bank?

Answer 4:

The United States has championed a capital increase for the IDB's private sector lending arm, IDB Invest, since President Biden announced support for it at the Ninth Summit of the Americas. The United States has the opportunity to contribute to this capital increase to maintain our current share in IDB Invest. If we do not contribute, our shares are likely to be purchased by other countries, including possibly China. This is what took place during the last IDB Invest capital increase, when the United States decided not to participate and the U.S. shareholding position was diluted from 22% to its current 15%. China was one of the countries that benefited

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from the lack of U.S. participation, enabling the expansion of its shareholding position.

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Question 5:
One week before the end of the Trump administration, then-Secretary Mike Pompeo designated Cuba as a 'state sponsor of terror' for "repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism in granting safe harbor to terrorists." In doing so, he cited the Cuban government's decision to host 10 Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) members in Cuba and their refusal to extradite those leaders to Colombia following a request from the Colombian government.

a. Is the Petro administration in Colombia currently seeking the extradition of those members of the ELN?

Those individuals were initially in Cuba to facilitate negotiations between Colombia and the ELN for a political settlement to the ongoing conflict. Last year, the Petro administration re-started those discussions and met with ELN members in Cuba for negotiations.

b. Does the Biden administration support negotiations between Colombia and the ELN? How do you assess the Cuban government's role in these negotiations?

The entire basis for the designation pertained to Cuba's decision to host these ELN members.

c. Given the active and ongoing negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN and the Petro administration's decision to not seek extradition of these people, what is the current and ongoing rationale for keeping Cuba on this list?

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Answer 5:

a. No, in November 2022, pursuant to an order from President Petro, the Colombian attorney general announced that arrest warrants would be suspended against 17 ELN commanders, including those Colombia previously requested that Cuba extradite.

b. Cuba is a guarantor to the ELN negotiations and has hosted two of the seven rounds of talks. The Biden administration understands President Petro's desire to expand the scope of the peace process in Colombia. At the same time, the right to justice for victims must be protected, and any agreements should comply with international humanitarian law, enhance the protection of civilians, and ensure there will be no impunity for criminal groups. We will continue to investigate and prosecute anyone who traffics drugs to the United States.

c. Cuba continues to harbor several U.S. fugitives from justice wanted on charges related to political violence, many of whom have resided in Cuba for decades.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 6:
In February 2023, the United States worked to free 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners who were imprisoned by the Ortega-Murillo regime. In fact, we flew those people directly to the United States on a US-government funded flight. Many of those individuals have been rendered stateless by the regime and they have applied for asylum so they are not at risk of deportation. I understand that of the 160 individuals who applied for asylum, only one has had an interview.

Will you work with your colleagues at DHS to prioritize their asylum applications, especially given our role in bringing them to the United States?

Answer 6:

We refer you to DHS for specifics on asylum processes.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 7:
The State Department's Foreign Relations of the United States series, within the Office of the Historian, publishes official documentary historical records of major US foreign policy decisions. A number of volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere that concern the period between 1977 and 1992 are currently under declassification review or are ready to be researched or prepared.

What is the status of these volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere and when do you expect they will be published?

Answer 7:

As discussed in the most recent reports to Congress on the status of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, its publication involves a complex, multi-stage interagency process stretching out over many years. Predicting the number of volumes that will be published in any given year remains challenging. Such predictions have grown more difficult over time, as any number of factors – such as technical, procedural, resource, and national security issues – may delay anticipated publication timelines. The Office of the Historian is currently juggling the preparation of some 86 FRUS volume manuscripts, containing well over 100,000 pages of

documentation, at various stages of production; their progress can be tracked on the Office of the Historian's website at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/status-of-the-series.

All WHA-related FRUS volumes for the Jimmy Carter administration and one WHA-related volume for the Ronald Reagan administration have been published. The status of each unpublished WHA-related volume for the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations is as follows:

Submitted for Editing and Declassification Review:

- 1981–1988, Volume XIV, Central America, 1981–1984
- 1981–1988, Volume XV, Central America, 1985–1988
- 1981–1988, Volume XVI, South America
- 1981–1988, Volume XVII, Part 1, Mexico; Western Caribbean
- 1981–1988, Volume XVII, Part 2, Eastern Caribbean

Being Researched or Prepared:

- 1981–1988, Volume XXIII, Iran-Contra Affair, 1985–1988
- 1989–1992, Volume XXII, Cuba; Haiti; Caribbean
- 1989–1992, Volume XXIII, Central America
- 1989–1992, Volume XXIV, Panama, 1981–1992
- 1989–1992, Volume XXV, South America
- 1989–1992, Volume XXXIII, Canada and Mexico

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by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 8:
Crisis in Haiti: Although Haiti now has an interim government in place, the political and humanitarian crisis in the country continues to unfold. The U.S. has been supportive of sending an international security force in response, but it has been delayed for months and the plan for this force remains unclear. What can you tell us about next steps for this security force? As the main financier of the force, what will the U.S. role be in ensuring that this mission protects the rights of Haitian civilians?

Answer 8:

The Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti initiated operations in June 2024. To date, more than 380 USG-vetted Kenyan police personnel have deployed to Port-au-Prince to support the MSS mission. Pledged personnel contributions from CARICOM countries are expected to grow the MSS force to approximately 1,000 personnel by the end of the summer.

In response to lessons learned from past stabilization efforts, the United States has devised near-, medium-, and long-term measures to mitigate human rights risks that incorporate, among other things, best practices regarding child protection and women, peace, and security,

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through the lifecycle of the MSS mission, and also include a compliance, oversight and accountability mechanism supported by third party expertise in human rights.

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Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 9:
Migration through Central America: Last month, the Biden Administration called out the Ortega regime's dangerous weaponization of migration. As the announcement stated, "President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo have put in place permissive-by-design migration policies that have introduced opportunities for migrant smuggling and trafficking networks to exploit migrants for economic gain and fuel dangerous, irregular travel towards the U.S. southwest border." What is the Administration's short-term response to the regime's continued exploitation of migrants through Nicaragua? How is the U.S. working with other countries in the region to address this challenge?

Answer 9:

No one should profit from vulnerable migrants – not smugglers, private companies, public officials, nor governments. In line with our commitments under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, we continue to engage with governments both within and outside the Americas, as well as the private sector, to eliminate this exploitative practice, which puts migrants in harm's way. Since the Department's November 2023 launch of a visa restriction policy that targets executives of charter flight companies transporting irregular migrants into Nicaragua, we have taken steps to impose visa restrictions against a number

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of individuals, resulting in a reduction in such flights. Additionally, we have sanctioned over 60 individuals and entities in Nicaragua and revoked visas for over 1,400 individuals responsible for the Ortega-Murillo regime's repression.

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by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
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Question 10:
Arms Trafficking: Gangs in Haiti have become increasingly powerful this year: they've taken over most of the capital city Port-au-Prince, terrorized the population, and are increasingly militarized - often using U.S.-made weapons. What is the Administration doing to halt the flow of arms from the United States into the hands of gangs in Haiti and cartels in Mexico?

Answer 10:

The Administration remains seized with slowing the flow of illicit arms from the United States into Haiti and Mexico. Using new authorities from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, DOJ has charged more than 200 defendants with offenses related to trafficking firearms to Mexico. ATF also signed an eTrace agreement with the Government of Haiti in November 2023 and has provided access to 22 states in Mexico. In February, HSI and the Government of Haiti signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to formally establish a Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit, which will facilitate cross-border investigations.

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Question 11:
Beyond sanctions: Last month, the Treasury Department announced new sanctions against companies in Nicaragua that have been benefitting and propping up the regime. These sanctions included Russian-owned companies in Nicaragua. What has been the response to these sanctions thus far? What else will the Biden Administration do to counter the Nicaraguan military partnership with Russia?

Answer 11:

On May 15, the United States sanctioned the Training Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for its role in supporting the Nicaraguan national police, a sanctioned entity involved in repressing the Nicaraguan people. We also sought assurances from other governments in the region to refrain from sending security personnel to the training center, to further prevent the spread of inhumane practices and mis- and disinformation. We closely monitor the Kremlin's support for Nicaragua, including its provision of military advisors, training and equipment, financial backing, and dissemination of disinformation. We are actively tracking Russia's desire to increase its influence in the Western Hemisphere as it seeks to decrease its global isolation following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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Posts in the region have engaged in a positive, values-based approach to strengthen partnerships and build resilience against Russian information manipulation. Current public diplomacy programming uses in-person programs, exchanges, diaspora outreach, media and digital literacy education, civil society training, and independent media investment to address the disinformation challenge.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Castro (No. 1 to No. 12),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 12:
Commitment to Democracy: In President Biden's recent trip to Europe he asked, "Will we stand against tyranny, against evil, against crushing brutality of the iron fist? Will we stand for freedom? Will we defend democracy?" What policy will offer a proportional response to the Ortega regime's repression and tyranny in Nicaragua?

Answer 12:

The United States is committed to promoting accountability for the Ortega-Murillo regime's brutal repression of civil society, blatant disregard for human rights, efforts to fuel irregular migration towards our southwest border, and actions to deepen ties with malign actors. To this end, the United States imposed financial sanctions on 51 individuals and 13 entities and has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on more than 1,400 Nicaraguans for their role in a regime that represses civil society organizations, closes civic spaces, and unjustly detains courageous individuals. We added 49 Nicaraguans to the Section 353 "Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors" list for undermining democratic processes or institutions in Nicaragua. Since 2022, Secretary Blinken has designated

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Nicaragua as a Country of Particular Concern for its engagement in or tolerance of particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

In May, the United States sanctioned the Training Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for its support of the Nicaraguan National Police, a sanctioned entity for its role in repressing the Nicaraguan people. The United States also designated two Nicaraguan gold mining companies - COMINTSA and Capital Mining – for their roles in manipulating the gold sector, an area in which the regime profits from corrupt operations. This follows the March 21 designation of Nicaraguan Attorney General Wendy Carolina Morales Urbina as a Specially Designated National (SDN) for her role as a government official involved in the ruthless repression of peaceful opposition members in Nicaragua.

The United States continues to sound the alarm on Ortega and Murillo's abuses of human rights through public and private channels, bilaterally and multilaterally, including at the Organization of American States, and we encourage our partners in and outside of the region to do the

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same. Parallel to these efforts, we continue to regularly engage with and amplify the work of Nicaraguan human rights defenders, journalists, and members of the political opposition to ensure their voices are not lost or dampened from the distance of exile or counter messaging from the Ortega-Murillo regime. Combined, these actions signal to President Ortega and Vice President Murillo that the United States sees and condemns their campaign of abuse and repression and stands with the Nicaraguan people's calls for a peaceful return to democracy and respect for human rights.

Questions for the Record from Representative Castro
"Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere"
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Tuesday, June 12th, 2024
Acting Assistant Administrator Michael Camilleri
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols

Question:

The State Department's Foreign Relations of the United States series, within the Office of the Historian, publishes official documentary historical records of major US foreign policy decisions. A number of volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere that concern the period between 1977 and 1992 are currently under declassification review or are ready to be researched or prepared.

1. What is the status of these volumes that pertain to the Western Hemisphere and when do you expect they will be published?
2. If any of these volumes are expected to be published behind the schedule required by statute, please describe the challenges facing the Department in publishing these volumes.

Answer:

USAID defers the question on the status of volumes to the State Department.

Question:

Democracy and Civil Society: What are the USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Answer:

USAID views civil society and other private actors—nongovernmental organizations, journalists, universities, faith groups, labor unions, community organizations, business entities—as essential building blocks of democracy and development.

USAID's new DRG Policy reaffirms and renews USAID's commitment to democratic governance and human rights by outlining approaches for enhancing the effectiveness of the United States' support for democratic development.

Under the interagency Voices initiative, USAID works with the State Department and like-minded partners–governments in the region and the international community, civil society, the

private sector, and others—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America.

USAID has consulted closely with organizations to better understand risks they're facing and increased programming in Central America to meet some of these challenges to respond directly to the regional trends impacting civil society organizations and independent media and to concerns our partners have raised.

Question:

In particular, What are funding priorities for civil society in Nicaragua - where the Ortega regime has quelled opposition, including by expelling and revoking citizenship of his critics - and in Haiti, where the country has not held elections since 2016?

Answer:

USAID is the leading donor in the area of democracy programming in Nicaragua. We are committed to supporting Nicaraguans in advancing towards a more democratic country. We support democratic actors who are continuing to make their voices heard in support of the democratic principles and respect for human rights that will be critical to any democratic progress.

To that end, USAID works alongside Nicaraguan civil society to promote democratic freedoms, including through human rights advocacy and documentation of human rights violations; supporting the survival of independent thought through independent media, think tanks, and civil society; and supporting political consensus-building among democratic actors. USAID programming also helps strengthen grassroots, community-level democratic actors engaging in community activism and civic engagement to keep alive a democratic culture and constituency.

Question:

Crisis in Haiti: Although Haiti now has an interim government in place, the political and humanitarian crisis in the country continues to unfold. The U.S. has been supportive of sending an international security force in response, but it has been delayed for months and the plan for this force remains unclear. What can you tell us about next steps for this security force? As the main financier of the force, what will the U.S. role be in ensuring that this mission protects the rights of Haitian civilians?

Answer:

USAID defers to the Department of State regarding the next steps for the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission.

Question:

Migration through Central America: Last month, the Biden Administration called out the Ortega regime's dangerous weaponization of migration. As the announcement stated, "President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo have put in place permissive-by-design migration policies that have introduced opportunities for migrant smuggling and trafficking networks to exploit migrants for economic gain and fuel dangerous, irregular travel towards the U.S. southwest border." What is the Administration's short-term response to the regime's continued exploitation of migrants through Nicaragua? How is the U.S. working with other countries in the region to address this challenge?

Answer:

In Nicaragua, USAID continues to support civil society, citizens, and the media to advocate for human rights and against exploitation. In neighboring Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, under the Administration's Root Causes Strategy, USAID works extensively to expand economic opportunities, improve governance, tackle corruption, crime, and more, so that Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans may confidently build secure and prosperous lives at home rather than undertaking irregular migration journeys that put them and their families at grave risk. Understanding that economic opportunities in home communities remain scarce for many populations across the region, USAID is helping build the capacity of these northern Central American governments (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) to operate and expand ethical, regulated systems that connect eligible interested workers with temporary labor opportunities abroad, while protecting their rights and supporting their efforts to invest income and skills gained abroad in their communities upon return. In addition, the mass outflow of more than 7.8 million Venezuelans over the past years has significantly impacted stability and security in the region with more than 6.5 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees residing in Latin America and the Caribbean. USAID is working to support the regularization and long-term integration of Venezuela migrants into key host countries in the region such as Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, and Panama.

Question:

Arms Trafficking: Gangs in Haiti have become increasingly powerful this year: they've taken over most of the capital city Port-au-Prince, terrorized the population, and are increasingly militarized - often using U.S.-made weapons. What is the Administration doing to halt the flow of arms from the United States into the hands of gangs in Haiti and cartels in Mexico?

Answer:

In Haiti, USAID supports citizen security at the local level and through support for the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS). USAID's technical assistance to the MSS focuses on promoting accountability; ensuring compliance with international human rights law, including in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and use of force; and promoting mission oversight. USAID's Citizen Security Program is working with Lakou Lape, a Haitian peacebuilding organization, to engage communities affected by violence. The activity builds mutual trust between communities and the Haitian National Police; supports the communities to implement small infrastructure projects; and enhances their access to social services, including support for survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

In Mexico, USAID works to address persistent levels of violence, including by supporting Mexico's shift toward civic justice. Under this approach, local authorities address low-level crime or administrative infractions (often committed by youth) and help identify at-risk youth to receive social services and psychological support at an early stage. Many of these interventions also substitute punitive sentences, such as fines or imprisonment, with alternative measures such as community service and counseling. These measures improve trust and cooperation between local communities and justice systems, contributing to more effective policing. USAID-supported youth in Mexico have a three percent recidivism rate, compared to a 24 percent recidivism rate among the broader youth-in-conflict-with-the-law population.

USAID defers the question on halting the flow of arms to the State Department.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Todd D. Robinson
by Representative Cherfilus-McCormick (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Illicit arms trafficking from the United States to the Caribbean, and Haiti specifically, is a regional and national security threat. Caribbean countries accounted for half of the world's top ten highest national murder rates.

The National Security Council has identified countering and preventing violence and illicit trafficking networks in the Caribbean as critical factors in addressing the root causes of migration. While not manufacturing any major weapons or ammunition, law enforcement officials in the Caribbean have identified Florida as a significant source of illicit firearms. I have seen the issue firsthand after I toured the Miami River with CPB earlier this year.

In response to uptick in trafficking, the Biden-Harris Administration has appointed a Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms Prosecutions to prosecute people smuggling guns to the Caribbean. I recently introduced the CATCH Act which will require the Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms Prosecutions to report on implementation efforts and coordination with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

Question 1:
How does the State Department coordinate with the Department of Justice's Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms Prosecutions, DHS, and other law enforcement agencies to prosecute arms trafficking?

Answer 1:

The State Department works with the Department of Justice,

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Commerce's

Bureau of Industry and Security, and Caribbean regional institutions to convene ministerial and technical-level meetings to advance capacity-building and information-sharing efforts under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. This coordination has resulted in: Caribbean-wide adoption of MOUs allowing the use of the the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' (ATF) eTrace system to help identify alleged gun traffickers and initiate criminal firearms investigations; implementation of the Caribbean Firearms Priority Actions and Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, including national action plans on firearms; creation of the CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit (CGIU) to assist Caribbean law enforcement authorities with criminal investigations, prosecutions, and intelligence exchange; and support for interagency vetted units focused on addressing illicit firearms.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Todd D. Robinson
by Representative Cherfilus-McCormick (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 2:
Are there more resources needed at U.S. ports to detect illegal firearms?

Answer 2:

The Department recognizes the importance of detecting illegal firearms at U.S. ports and would defer to DHS on resource requirements for outbound cargo screening and other efforts to detect outbound illicit firearms trafficking at U.S. ports.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Todd D. Robinson
by Representative Cherfilus-McCormick (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 3:
What other policies would assist you in curbing the flow of illicit firearms to the Caribbean?

Answer 3:

The Department remains concerned with illicit firearms trafficking flowing from the Miami River to the Caribbean. We will continue to work with DHS and international partners to address this trafficking flow and would defer to DHS to recommend U.S. policy solutions to mitigate the issue domestically.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Todd D. Robinson
by Representative Cherfilus-McCormick (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 4:

Haiti is at an inflection point. We must also look to the future of Haiti. Recently, I introduced along with Congresswomen Schakowsky and Yvette Clarke, a resolution calling for a development program to rebuild Haiti to stabilize the country, strengthen democratic and judiciary institutions, invest in critical infrastructure, spur economic growth, and improve opportunities to women and youth to secure the welfare of the Haitian people.

As both the State Department and USAID are implementers of the Global Fragility Act strategy, can you describe what programs can assist with economic development and strengthening judicial institutions in Haiti?

Answer 4: State/USAID Joint response

Haiti is at an inflection point, indeed. USAID is optimistic that recent initiatives, including those you describe as well as the arrival of the Multinational Security Support Mission will support Haitians as they pursue a more stable and secure future. The priorities you summarized, such as those in the CATCH Act, align closely with the 10-year plan under the Global

Fragility Act's Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS) as well as with the USAID/Haiti Strategic Framework.

Per the SPCPS 10-year plan's sub-objective 2.2, USAID will address the critical need of resuming economic activities in the Port-au-Prince (PAP) metropolitan area by expanding and deepening support to micro and small enterprises that can provide basic services to populations in and around gang-affected areas of PAP, while creating livelihood and economic opportunities in these areas. USAID will collaborate closely with microfinance institutions and business advisors to quickly identify and support MSMEs that have a potential to rapidly resume or expand operations to create jobs.

Questions for the Record from Representative Chefilus-McCormick
"Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere"
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Tuesday, June 12, 2024
Acting Assistant Administrator Michael Camilleri

Question:

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Answer:

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Questions for the Record from Representative Gerald E. Connolly
"Great Power Competition in the Western Hemisphere"
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Tuesday, June 12th, 2024
Acting Assistant Administrator Michael Camilleri

Question:

In October 2023, I wrote Secretary of State Blinken to ask how many United States Citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents have been detained in El Salvador since the start of the State of Exception in March 2022.

The Department's response noted that they have not determined any American wrongfully detained in El Salvador.

1. Have all Americans who have been detained in the State of Exception received due process, adequate medical attention, and full consular visitation?

Virginian Walter Josué Huete Alvarado has reportedly been detained under the State of Exception.

2. What protections do we have in place to ensure that U.S. assistance is not used to detain or deprive the rights of U.S. citizens?

Answer:

We would defer questions about consular access to the Department of State.

Although the State of Exception put in place by President Bukele has coincided with a decrease in overall violent crime rates, USAID is concerned about the suspension of due process and other constitutional human rights guarantees for tens of thousands of Salvadorans.

It is estimated that over 80,000 Salvadorans have been detained under the State of Exception, including over 3,000 children. While information provided by the Government of El Salvador is limited, local and international organizations have documented abuses by state actors both within the prison system and in communities, as well as hardships suffered by the families of those who have been detained.

We know from lessons learned around the globe, as well as here in the United States, that a highly punitive response to crime and violence is unlikely to be sustainable over the medium-to-long term.

USAID does not currently provide assistance to the Salvadoran police or any other security institutions in El Salvador. In response to the SOE and alongside the State Department, we have strengthened our support for civil society organizations, academic institutions, and

independent media engaged in documentation, oversight, advocacy, and legal and other forms of assistance. This includes protection assistance - support for relocation, digital and physical security upgrades, and legal aid - for human rights and other defenders facing threats. USAID also works with entities such as the Public Defender's Office and the National Council on Early Childhood, Children, and Adolescents (CONAPINA) to help strengthen their capacity to deliver vital services.

USAID joins interagency colleagues in direct conversations with Salvadoran counterparts, encouraging their government to restore due process and constitutional human rights guarantees and to support the reintegration of formerly incarcerated youth.

We manage all coordination with the Government of El Salvador carefully and with proper oversight to ensure taxpayer dollars are used responsibly.

Question:

House Republicans have proposed an 11% cut in the State and Foreign Operations budget that will gut the State Department's and USAID's presence and programming in Latin America and the Caribbean.

How will that help us counter Beijing's malign influence in our own backyard and provide credible alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative?

Answer:

USAID must be clear-eyed about the strategic context in which we operate, and the role that the People's Republic of China (PRC) plays around the world. What the PRC does increasingly has an outsized impact on the Agency's work. The PRC's influence can have a detrimental effect on the United States' national security interests and USAID's own affirmative development agenda.

The United States is broadly viewed as the preferred partner in the region, but cutting the Department of State and Foreign Operations budget, including funding to USAID, would significantly hamper our ability to compete with the PRC in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Cutting funding would limit our ability to provide assistance in ways that meaningfully make us more competitive in the region while making it more difficult for the PRC to engage in practices that enable corruption and inhibit sustainable economic growth in partner countries.

Development is the ground game for strategic competition. USAID's development principles and practices elevate inclusion, transparency, independence, partnership, sustainability, and respect for human rights and democratic norms – and build on USAID's decades-long history of supporting partners to achieve their own priorities and self-determination. USAID invests in areas critical for long-term, sustainable development and the foundations for open, transparent, and sovereign societies. USAID is proud that U.S. assistance does not need to be

repaid – our assistance is not a loan. USAID offers low- and middle-income countries an affirmative development model – one rooted not in debt and dependence, but in economic trade and integration, inclusivity, locally-led solutions, and democratic values.

USAID takes an affirmative approach, grounded in the enduring appeal of democratic values and institutions. It partners with countries to invigorate democracy, enhance human rights and justice, and bolster governance that advances the public interest and delivers inclusive development. Our focus is not on changing the PRC, but on working with USAID allies and partners to shape the environment in which Beijing operates – and in doing so, advance USAID's affirmative vision for open, transparent, and rules-based societies. This is where development tools can play a critical and central role. USAID will work with partners to nurture open and rights-affirming digital infrastructure; foster trusted, accountable, and effective governance institutions; advance transparent management of natural resources; and support their ability to make sovereign decisions in line with their interests and values, free from external pressure. Competitors to the United States are not worried about promoting truth or democratic freedoms. They are successfully leveraging new technologies and digital insecurity, especially in low- and middle-income countries, to access vast troves of data, launch targeted information manipulation campaigns, discredit shared values for global cooperation, and undermine U.S. interests. USAID seeks to reduce societal vulnerabilities, so our partners can withstand the influence of the PRC and other malign actors.

The Agency will work with the private sector to unleash economic growth and USAID partner countries' potential. The Agency knows that USAID grants-based assistance can go even further when combined with U.S. public and private investments, which far outstrip the resources that the PRC has brought to the table to date. USAID must operate at a different scale to effectively counter these trends.

Question:

If a democratically elected government in the region shows signs of working more closely with China, how does the U.S government (especially state and DOD) respond? Scolding or threatening doesn't seem to work.

Answer:

As the Administration's National Security Strategy states, the People's Republic of China (PRC) harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit, even as the United States remains committed to managing the competition between our countries responsibly. While every context and relationship is different at any moment in time, our general approach is that we are not asking our partners to make a choice. Instead, we offer our partners choices by emphasizing

our affirmative and positive vision for development and the beneficial features of USAID's approach, touting the benefits of our partnership based on our history of success.

We would defer your specific request to the Departments of State and Defense.

Question:

We hear a lot about Chinese economic investments, which shouldn't surprise us because the United States supported China's accession to the WTO 25 years ago. We hear less about Chinese defense or military cooperation projects, other than arms sales.

1. What are some concerning examples of Chinese/PLA security assistance or defense cooperation in the region?
2. If a unit of Latin American government uses Huawei telecoms equipment, how will the U.S government engage with that unit going forward?

Answer:

USAID respectfully defers questions on security assistance and defense cooperation in the region to the Departments of State and Defense.

The Administration's approach to the PRC, which Secretary Blinken laid out in his May 2022 speech, is to "invest, align, and compete." The PRC has demonstrated itself to be effective at facilitating business relationships between Chinese telecommunications companies and partners in LAC based on shared interests. This is why USAID's approach to mitigating the challenges posed by the PRC has a goal of supporting partner countries to develop open and secure digital ecosystems – including robust cybersecurity – and policies and regulations consistent with international standards. In practice, for example, over the past two years, the PRC has positioned Huawei as a major player in providing "smart city" digital infrastructure for delivery of services to Honduran municipal and national government entities and has supported Huawei in securing a contract for IT infrastructure at a large civic center to be built by the Government of Honduras. In response, the USG, and USAID in particular, has been successful in promoting U.S. telecommunications as a preferable alternative for technical assistance in digitizing municipal services.

a. For example, combined USAID and U.S. Commercial Service interventions resulted in the Municipality of Cortes--home to Honduras' critical deepwater port--canceling an MOU signed with Huawei. The Municipality pivoted to discussing digital platforms and services with U.S. telecommunications companies, with technical assistance provided by USAID's Transforming Market Systems activity.

b. USAID is also engaging with stakeholders in Jamaica to develop local cybersecurity capacity. We are investing in efforts to strengthen the government's cybersecurity institutions and provide trusted technologies to reduce vulnerabilities to frequent cyber attacks that could potentially fuel regional instability and put U.S. national security at risk.

c. In Mexico, in the nearshoring priority state of Nuevo Leon, USAID is helping municipalities improve regulatory frameworks for 5G infrastructure. Municipal governments in particular generally lack the requisite regulations or protocols to look beyond the cheapest vendor offerings to instead consider market justifications for other valuable benefits such as open and interoperable networks and cybersecurity specifications. Improving the regulatory frameworks for 5G infrastructure rather than focusing on vendors that often offer savings in initial costs will open up competition to others besides low cost, untrusted vendors.

Question:

The administration has offered a viable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative in the region, a program called the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity.

Could you elaborate on how we can start to produce tangible results for countries that choose to follow our vision for a democratic, prosperous, and free western hemisphere?

Answer:

As you note, in June 2022, President Biden announced the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) at the Summit of Americas in Los Angeles, California. The Americas Partnership charts a path forward to tackle economic inequality, foster regional economic integration and good jobs, and restore faith in democracy by delivering for working people across the region. This supports USAID's approach to counter PRC influence in the region, which is not about forcing countries to choose between U.S. assistance and other sources of financing. Rather, it is about working in partnership toward sustainable solutions around shared goals. In addition, USAID takes an affirmative approach, grounded in the enduring appeal of democratic values and institutions. It partners with countries to invigorate democracy, enhance human rights and justice, and bolster governance that advances the public interest and delivers inclusive development.

In the case of APEP, USAID programming supports APEP's overarching objective of deepening economic integration, creating well-paying jobs throughout the region, and promoting competitiveness and innovation in the Americas. In addition, USAID implements a regional APEP Accelerator activity that will run through September 2025 and intends to have multiple

cohorts of entrepreneurs during that time. The program leverages highly capable local and regional partners in seeking to directly support approximately 300 enterprises across all ten Americas Partnership countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region. The Accelerator is working to improve entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills, and to expand their access to investment, markets, and networks.

Enterprises benefitting from the Accelerator will serve as engines of growth and inclusion in the Americas Partnership region, creating jobs, expanding commerce, and advancing innovation. The Accelerator also has the potential to build momentum and demonstrate proof of concept of the untapped potential of entrepreneurs with viable, for-profit business ideas in the region, attracting new, sustainable investment flows. USAID's $5 million in funding for the accelerator will mobilize additional public and private investments in participating enterprises and in complementary efforts, building on the commitments from Canada and Uruguay and collaboration with the IDB already announced at last November's Leaders Summit.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
The response from the Department did not answer that question, so let me ask you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, does the Administration track how many Americans have been detained in the State of Exception in El Salvador? The Department's response noted that they have not determined any American wrongfully detained in El Salvador.

Answer 1:

As a matter of policy, we do not share specific numbers of U.S. citizens, including prisoners, in any country. In addition to privacy and security considerations, it is difficult to provide accurate estimates due to the possibility of dual citizens and individuals who are unaware they may have a claim to U.S. citizenship. The U.S. Embassy in San Salvador receives timely notification of U.S. citizen arrests from local authorities and does not experience undue obstacles to visiting U.S. citizens and providing them with consular services.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 2:
Have all Americans who have been detained in the State of Exception received due process, adequate medical attention, and full consular visitation? Virginian Walter Josué Huete Alvarado has reportedly been detained under the State of Exception.

Answer 2:

The U.S. embassy in El Salvador regularly requests consular access to imprisoned U.S. citizens and makes prison visits to provide consular services and to assess the welfare of U.S. citizens in custody.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 3:
How has the State Department engaged with Salvadoran counterparts on his case specifically?

Answer 3:

The State Department is in direct contact with the Government of El Salvador regarding U.S. citizen prisoners and their wellbeing. The State Department advocates for these U.S. citizens to receive appropriate medical care and due legal process. We are in touch with family members and attorneys of any detained U.S. citizens, who usually reach out quickly after an arrest or detention.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 4:
On a broader point – What is the Administration's plan to support efforts to combat transnational criminal organizations, but ensure U.S. assistance is not used to violate the rights of U.S. citizens abroad?

Answer 4:

The Department works to advance the Administration's 2023 *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)*—the goal of the *Strategy* is to degrade the ability of transnational criminal organizations to harm U.S. citizens, businesses, and government to protect U.S. national security, prosperity, and the rule of law. INL employs several tools to advance counter-TOC objectives, including supporting foreign partners to strengthen interdictions, investigations, and prosecutions and address TOC enablers such as corruption; leveraging anti-crime sanctions and deterrence tools; and working in multilateral fora to spur international action. U.S. assistance to foreign criminal justice partners contributes to ensuring that these systems advance the rule of law while protecting the rights of individuals. Some INL programs include support for judicial reforms – such as the vetting of judges and prosecutors to target corruption in the justice sector – that support a culture of lawfulness and that underscore respect for human

Questions for the Record Submitted to
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June 12, 2024

Question 5:
The question now becomes how can we support Guatemala's leadership in dealing with certain institutions in the country that would rather not see reforms related to transparency and anti-corruption measures?

Answer 5:

We will continue to stand by the Guatemalan people and support efforts that reinforce Guatemala's democracy. For months, the U.S. government repeatedly stated in public remarks, press releases, and sanctions and visa restrictions announcements that we were committed to using all available tools to promote accountability for those who undermine democracy in Guatemala. Countering corruption is a core national security interest and foreign policy priority. U.S. messaging and action is essential to carrying out the U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption as well as the U.S. Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration. To support these commitments, the United States will provide technical assistance to the Guatemalan executive branch, including the National Commission Against Corruption (CNC) and integrity units within certain ministries to deter and

prevent corruption, identify perpetrators, and issue recommendations to improve existing units, enhance staff capacity, and strengthen institutions. We will also continue to use sanctions and visa restrictions to discourage corruption.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 6:
House Republicans have proposed an 11% cut in the State and Foreign Operations budget that will gut the State Department's and USAID's presence and programming in Latin America and the Caribbean. How will that help us counter Beijing's malign influence in our own backyard and provide credible alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative?

Answer 6:

The United States is broadly viewed as the preferred partner in the region but cutting the Department of State and Foreign Operations budget, including to USAID, would significantly hamper our ability to compete with the PRC in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cutting funding would limit our ability to staff our missions and provide assistance in ways that meaningfully make us more competitive in the region. U.S. personnel operating in Latin America and the Caribbean work tirelessly to advance democratic governance, bolster rule of law, champion human rights defenders, build economic resilience, increase financial transparency, promote renewable energy, and counter digital authoritarianism. If we hope to maintain our edge and increase the region's resilience to PRC influence and coercion, we

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

must continue to invest in these critical hemispheric relationships. Cutting funding for Department of State and USAID programming in the region would be a major strategic victory for the PRC and risks ceding key terrain in the struggle to preserve global democracy—a mistake we cannot afford to make in the short or long term.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 7:
If a democratically elected government in the region shows signs of working more closely with China, how does the U.S government (especially state and DOD) respond? Scolding or threatening doesn't seem to work.

Answer 7:

PRC engagement in the region blurs the lines of what constitutes a traditional "military threat" because it engages in economic coercion, the systematic stealing of technology and intellectual property, pernicious propaganda and disinformation campaigns, and malicious cyber activity. The PRC creates areas of power by building and operating critical infrastructure, controlling information technology networks, monopolizing access to vital supply chains such as critical and rare earth elements, and strategically constructing ports near maritime chokepoints that could facilitate future military activities.

The PRC does not have military bases in the region, and U.S. defense engagements continue to dwarf the PRC's. But it has maintained and expanded its military presence through participation in bilateral exercises

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

and exchanges, periodic visits by their hospital ship, the Peace Ark, regular sponsorship of Latin American and Caribbean officers to attend PRC training and professional military education institutions, and participation in the programs of some security institutions.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 8:
What are some concerning examples of Chinese/PLA security assistance or defense cooperation in the region?

Answer 8:

PRC engagement in the region blurs the lines of what constitutes a traditional "military threat" because it engages in economic coercion, the systematic stealing of technology and intellectual property, pernicious propaganda and disinformation campaigns, and malicious cyber activity. The PRC creates areas of power by building and operating critical infrastructure, controlling information technology networks, monopolizing access to vital supply chains such as critical and rare earth elements, and strategically constructing ports near maritime chokepoints that could facilitate future military activities.

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June 12, 2024

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Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 9:
If a unit of Latin American government uses Huawei telecoms equipment, how will the U.S government engage with that unit going forward?

Answer 9:

We engage with governments in Latin America and around the globe on the importance to their national security of using trusted ICT suppliers and we work actively with any partners seeking to secure their networks.

The use of trusted suppliers signals a government's commitment to essential building blocks of an innovative digital economy: rule of law, data privacy, IP protection, and free competition. As global supply chains integrate, this can send an important signal to investors seeking to operate in countries with secure networks. We commend partner countries already leaning forward on developing secure network infrastructure, especially Costa Rica with its government's commitment to the Budapest Convention and its widely-attend 5G regional conference in April.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Connolly (No. 1 to No. 10),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 10:
The administration has offered a viable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative in the region, a program called the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity. Could you elaborate on how we can start to produce tangible results for countries that choose to follow our vision for a democratic, prosperous, and free western hemisphere?

Answer 10:
The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity has already produced tangible results. For example, a Clean Hydrogen working group now coordinates on technical and regulatory issues to help grow this renewable energy source across the Americas. The United States, Canada, and Uruguay have created an accelerator to recruit and train 750 entrepreneurs throughout the region. Uruguay recently unveiled a network of angel investors that have pledged to invest $1 billion by 2030 and a digital platform that will help attract greater investment for entrepreneurs across the region. Costa Rica has established a Center of Excellence to make workers across the Americas more competitive in the digital economy. The Americas Partnership Platform – an innovative framework set up between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the U.S. International

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Development Finance Corporation (DFC) – has identified $3 billion in infrastructure opportunities for private sector investment across the hemisphere. The DFC has also created a $30 million fund to provide technical assistance to enhance the competitiveness of these projects undertaken with IDB investment. The technical assistance will lead to transactions that create enduring value for Americas Partnership economies by adhering to high standards for labor, transparency, and environment that are true to our values as societies. The United States is also contributing $10 million for an IDB-managed Fund for Nature that will provide early-stage grant financing in the Western Hemisphere for technical cooperation that catalyzes investment in the region's natural capital and unlock nature-based solutions.

At the July 17 Foreign Affairs Ministerial hosted by the Secretary of State, all 12 partner nations reaffirmed their commitment to the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity as an enduring strategic forum to strengthen hemispheric economic integration and competitiveness.

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We announced a second semiconductor symposium in Mexico that will continue to build out a semiconductor supply chain in the hemisphere by focusing on the supplier ecosystem. In addition, a new U.S. semiconductor program aimed at facilitating chips production in three Americas Partnership countries aims to "turbocharge" regional semiconductor supply chains. By improving the backbone of our supply chains, these high-standard projects will help ensure the goods our people rely on – semiconductors, electric vehicle batteries, medical supplies – are more affordable, more secure, and made right here in the Americas.

This is a true partnership and enthusiasm from our partners has been palpable. Additional countries in the region have expressed an interest in joining, and we were pleased to announce during the ministerial that the inaugural Americas Partnership countries adopted a formal process for considering prospective participants. We will continue to work with our partners to show concrete results.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
Are such port calls routine? When was the last time Russia conducted a similar exercise with Russia or another country?

Answer 1:

Russia has routinely sailed ships through the Caribbean or had port calls in Cuba. Russia sailed ships into the Western Hemisphere yearly from 2013 to 2020, and we have regularly observed Russian naval port visits to Havana since the early 2000s. We have observed Russian naval port visits to Havana since the George W. Bush administration and they have occurred during each U.S. administration since then. Russia has also conducted naval exercises with China and Iran.

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by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 2:
What is the Department's assessment of this situation?

Answer 2:

This visit does not surprise us given Russia's long history of Cuban port calls. These routine, periodic naval visits remain part of Russian military exercises, which have continued throughout various U.S. administrations.

As the Department of Defense has stated publicly, Russia's deployments are part of its routine naval activity; these deployments do not cause us concern, and pose no direct threat to the United States.

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Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 3:
What does this exercise signal to the United States and our allies in the region?

Answer 3:

While we note disappointment that Cuba agreed to host visiting Russian ships, the event did not surprise us. Cuba regularly hosts Russian ships, including every year between 2013 and 2020. Prior to that, Cuba periodically hosted visits by Soviet naval ships.

We assess Cuba's overall goals include: to shore up much-needed energy supplies ahead of the summer through better bilateral relations with Russia; to restructure its debt to Russia; to obtain support for its beleaguered economy through commercial deals with Russian companies; and to increase Russian tourism to Cuba.

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by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
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Question 4:
What is State doing to deter future activities like this from happening in America's backyard, and from Russia threatening the U.S. and our allies?

Answer 4:

We should expect more of this activity going forward, although we note these deployments incur a cost on the Russian navy, which struggles to maintain readiness and conduct deployments with an aged fleet.

We have shared information about Russia's activities with our allies and remain focused on countering the Kremlin's attempt to increase its influence in the region.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 5:
Following the disqualification of presidential candidates and the continued harassment of opposition leaders, do you believe that the administration's decision was justified?

Answer 5:

The Administration has increased actions to counter Iran, including its efforts to expand its ties to Venezuela, through a range of tools at our disposal including sanctions, diplomatic pressure, as well as consistent engagement and coordination with our partners in Latin America. We actively engage a wide range of countries in the region to warn them against allowing Iran to use their jurisdictions to support terrorism and destabilizing behavior. Some specific case information remains classified, and we refer you to the FBI and intelligence community for those details.

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Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 6:
How does the Biden administration plan to strengthen the bilateral relationship during his second term?

Answer 6:

The Administration continues to engage the Salvadoran government in areas of mutual interest, including fostering economic solutions to address root causes of irregular migration to the United States. The Administration also plans to deliver technical assistance related to due process and judicial reform to assist El Salvador in preserving the security gains it has made while strengthening human rights for all Salvadorans, especially the most vulnerable.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Hill (No. 1 to No. 7),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 7:
El Salvador went from fourth largest source of migration to the United States in 2020 to 11th largest source in 2023. How can the United States continue to utilize our partnership with El Salvador to deter additional migration from other countries in Central and South America who may pass through the country on their way to the southern border?

Answer 7:

Irregular migration from El Salvador to the United States has declined by 38 percent compared to its 2021 peak, with Salvadorans now constituting approximately 2.4 percent of total migrant encounters at the U.S. southwest border. El Salvador has served as a strong partner on our work to stem irregular migration to the United States, including through collaboration on the H-2 Visa Program, which offers an alternative to irregular migration. To curb third country nationals entering or transiting El Salvador to migrate north, we continue to urge El Salvador to enact a transit visa regime.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian A. Nichols,
by Representative Kamlager-Dove (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
I serve as the co-chair of the Brazil Caucus, and in March I led a trip to Brazil focused on JAPER, the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial Discrimination, an important initiative to promote racial equity for Black Americans and Afro-Brazilians. However, it seemed like few civil society groups were familiar with the initiative or involved in its implementation.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, could you share the State Department's implementation plan and targeted deliverables for the five pillars, and which office is coordinating the response among the domestic agencies involved in JAPER?

Answer 1:

The State Department closely coordinates with the Government of Brazil, the U.S. interagency, and U.S. and Brazilian civil society to hold quarterly technical sessions on the four JAPER pillars: increasing access to education, providing greater access to healthcare, addressing violence and promoting justice, and nurturing culture and preserving memory. The Government of Brazil coordinates Brazilian civil society input and participation in JAPER. The quarterly sessions include a discussion of challenges and exchange of best practices and ideas for collaboration to

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ensure JAPER benefits people of African descent and Indigenous communities in both the United States and Brazil.

Since May 2023, efforts to advance JAPER include Mission Brazil's donation of 400 body-worn cameras to help reduce instances of excessive police force and the launch of a $1,000,000 ($500,000 for Brazil) grant to remove barriers to inclusion for marginalized communities. In May 2024, the State Department's Cultural Heritage Center, in collaboration with Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History, launched Afro-Connections, an exchange program for museum and cultural heritage professionals from Brazil. The program centers on community engagement and seeks to elevate the voices, history, and culture of communities of African descent.

The Race, Ethnicity, and Social Inclusion Unit (RESIU) in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs coordinates JAPER interagency input in close collaboration with the Office of Brazilian and Southern Cone Affairs, Mission Brazil, and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian A. Nichols,
by Representative Kamlager-Dove (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 2:
I commend the State Department for leading the charge to coordinate an international response to the security, governance, and economic crisis in Haiti, and we have seen some important signs of progress in the last few months. The Transitional Presidential Council recently appointed a new prime minister and cabinet, an important step toward a political track that must accompany a security solution.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, once the Kenyan-led multinational security support mission deploys to Haiti, what are the next steps for the new prime minister and his cabinet?

Answer 2:

Solving the political crisis in Haiti requires holding free and fair elections. The transition government plans to name a Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), publish an electoral decree and calendar, and ensure the CEP can carry out voter registration, technical training, and IT system updates.

Prime Minister Conille, in coordination with the Transitional Presidential Council, is developing a comprehensive and holistic plan for the stabilization of Haiti that seeks to improve the justice sector and enhance food security and economic growth. The Administration remains committed to supporting these efforts, including through the Global Fragility Act.

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Assistant Secretary Brian A. Nichols,
by Representative Kamlager-Dove (No. 1 to No. 4),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 3:
Illegal mining perpetuates human rights abuses against indigenous communities, causes massive environmental destruction and deforestation, and empowers transnational criminal organizations that threaten democracy and the rule of law. Me and my colleague Rep. Mills actually introduced a bill last year to counter this harmful practice.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, how does U.S. contributions to the Amazon Fund help counter the deforestation caused by criminal actors engaged in illegal mining practices?

Answer 3:

To date, the United States has committed $50 million to the Amazon Fund, the first contribution as part of President Biden's commitment in 2023 to work with Congress to contribute $500 million to the Amazon Fund and related forest-protection activities over five years.

The FY23 U.S. contribution does not yet have earmarks for specific programming. In the past, the Amazon Fund has supported a range of law enforcement activities, including operations targeted at illegal mining and illegal deforestation. Many of the programs under the Amazon Fund focus

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on law enforcement, along with regularization of land ownership, building the capacity of Indigenous peoples and local communities to manage and conserve their land, and growing state and local government capacity to oversee legal water and land use.

The Amazon Fund has supported multiple law enforcement activities that resulted in reduced deforestation, including from mining and other organized criminal activities in protected areas and Indigenous reserves. Activities have focused on environmental monitoring, increased information sharing among law enforcement agencies, and fighting organized crime.

Notably, numerous studies conclude that transnational criminal organization (TCO) networks carry out environmental crimes such as illegal mining in tandem with drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other criminal activity. Other programs under the Amazon Fund have supported use of satellite imagery to monitor deforestation; build government capacity to document land ownership and uses of land and water to regularize

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permitting; and expand agricultural programs to benefit families that live off the land. Each of these programs promotes stability in the vast Amazon region—a fundamental element for achieving a wide range of U.S. goals, including conservation, combatting transnational crime, and countering malign PRC influence.

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by Representative Kamlager-Dove (No. 1 to No. 4),
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Question 4:
Mexican President Lopez Obrador has accelerated the militarization of Mexico's government in response to very real threats of organized crime and insecurity. But as the armed forces take responsibility for a growing number of civilian functions, this raises concerns about preserving Mexico's democratic institutions and the government's accountability to the people.

Assistant Secretary Nichols, how is the U.S. planning to engage President-elect Sheinbaum's administration about the risks of militarization as a governing approach, and how are we providing viable alternatives that protect democracy, human rights, and access to justice?

Answer 4:

While Mexico has the sovereign right to deploy its military forces in ways consistent with its constitution, we believe public security challenges require civilian law enforcement and criminal justice solutions. We continue to work with Mexico and the incoming Sheinbaum administration to build transparent, accountable, and effective public security institutions. The promotion, respect, and protection of human rights remains central to our foreign policy and bilateral relationship with Mexico. We use a wide range of diplomatic tools to advance respect for human rights, including working

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directly with the Mexican government and civil society. In our work with the Mexican military, we protect human rights, uphold fundamental freedoms, and mitigate civilian harm, including through security assistance and proposed arms transfers in accordance with the Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) Policy. All security forces must pass Leahy vetting before we provide any applicable assistance.

In this context, we appreciated the two revisions to the constitutional amendment authorizing the deployment of the Mexican military on domestic security missions from 2024 to 2028. These revisions would increase the military's accountability and fund much-needed development of security forces at the state and local levels. We continue to engage closely with Mexico on these issues as the country transitions to a new administration.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Salazar (No. 1 to No. 1),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
Has INL made the recommendation that Tren de Aragua be designated a Transnational Criminal Organization by OFAC?

Answer 1:

The Department of the Treasury can designate criminal organizations as transnational criminal organizations through sanctions under E.O. 13581, as amended. While the United States does not preview sanctions, we have and will continue to explore the use of all available tools to disrupt Tren de Aragua and other criminal organizations that enable drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, and other transnational crimes, including human trafficking. On July 11, 2024, the Department of the Treasury sanctioned Tren de Aragua as a transnational criminal organization.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Salazar (No. 1 to No. 5),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
Are you aware of the situation in Nicaragua regarding a Texas-based ministry, Mountain Gateway, who has 11 Nicaraguan pastors and 2 lawyers imprisoned since December 2023? They have not been seen by their families or lawyers. There is no proof of life. A husband and wife are imprisoned and separated from their nursing age baby and 2-year-old. Those two children were born in California and are US citizens. How do you plan to hold the Nicaraguan government accountable for their ongoing human rights violations? Will Nicaragua's membership in CAFTA-DR be affected by their innumerable human rights violations?

Answer 1:

We share your profound concerns about the wellbeing of the Mountain Gateway prisoners, as well as the wellbeing of all unjustly detained prisoners in Nicaragua. The Department closely followed the sham Nicaraguan judicial proceedings related to the Mountain Gateway prisoners and continues to press for their release. The Department will continue to apply the full array of diplomatic tools available to hold the Ortega-Murillo regime accountable for its egregious human rights abuses and its violent repression of civil society. Since 2022, Secretary Blinken has designated Nicaragua as a Country of Particular Concern for its engagement in or

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tolerance of particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Department highlighted the Mountain Gateway case in the 2023 International Religious Freedom Report.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Salazar (No. 1 to No. 5),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 2:
The peaceful transition of power in Guatemala this January confirms that its democratic institutions are intact. With sustained governmental and economic stability, now is the time to strengthen the enabling environment for businesses to create jobs in the formal sector that will counter China's growing influence in Central America and can facilitate near-shoring our supply chains at the same time. The business community in Guatemala unequivocally and vocally supported the democratic process at each step. These businesses a necessary partner in creating jobs on the scale necessary to reduce migration to the U.S. and has worked with McKinsey and Company to develop the Guatemala No se Detiene plan (Guatemala Moving Forward, roughly translated), which identifies specific, actionable recommendations across 5 pillars to help produce 2.5 million jobs over 10 years, the majority of which directly align with the Biden Administration's Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration. Could you please describe what projects or activities that the State Department and USAID are taking, or planning to take, in partnership with the private sector in Guatemala to support the creation of broad-based formal sector jobs in Guatemala? Could you please tell us about what steps the State Department may be taking to engage the new Administration in Guatemala to prioritize reforms and other actions that are consistent with both of these plans to strengthen the enabling environment for businesses to create jobs in the formal sector?

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Answer 2:

The role of the private sector is critical, particularly at this moment. We share a common goal of catalyzing equitable economic growth in Guatemala. U.S. businesses are hesitant to work with countries where governments wield institutions as political weapons. Companies operating in environments without rule of law cannot thrive in a globally connected economy. The United States will continue to support the efforts of the new administration in Guatemala to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law. In addition, Embassy Guatemala City will host an interagency Investment Facilitation Team from July 22-24 as part of Vice President Harris' Central America Forward initiative. The delegation will meet with private sector representatives, government officials, and local communities to assess how the United States can help mobilize critical infrastructure investment in Guatemala. This visit follows the inaugural United States-Guatemala High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED) in March, which was a significant step to mobilize inclusive economic growth in Guatemala. The

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HLED included dialogue with the private sector, engagement on anti-corruption, and dialogue with Indigenous leaders. The HLED complements and advances the Vice President Harris' Central America Forward initiative under the Root Causes Strategy. HLED discussions focused on 1) good governance; 2) investment promotion; 3) agriculture and food security; 4) energy security; and 5) remittances. We've established working groups for each pillar to facilitate interagency coordination, as well as coordination with the Government of Guatemala and the private sector. We're working to set up follow-on discussions to further advance these efforts.

The State Department defers to USAID for details on USAID programming.

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Question 3:
Widespread theft of electricity and illegal connections to the grid, particularly in Guatemala, cause significant interruption of the power supply to communities from which many Central American migrants originate. These are also areas that Guatemalan President Arevalo has said need to be included in development planning. The State Department has identified service inadequacies as a cause of migration, and those inadequacies also prevent expansion of the productive industry that could bring inclusive economic growth. The Biden Administration's Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America pledges to support increased electricity reliability and grid sustainability (Pillar I, Line of Effort 4). In addition, the United States Strategy on Countering Corruption, released in December 2021, further states that "non-state armed groups enrich themselves through illicit proceeds and trade of high-value commodities." Directives related to addressing electricity theft were included in the Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations Act and in Fiscal Year 2024. Could you please provide an update on actions taken to comply with those directives and also tell us what the United States is doing to publicly identify individuals or groups responsible and assist our local law enforcement partners in targeting and disrupting this activity?

Answer 3:

As part of the inaugural United States-Guatemala High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED) in March, and in alignment with President Arévalo's commitment to connect all Guatemalan households to energy services, the United States will invest $3.8 million to increase electricity access, promote

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productive uses of electricity, and improve local and national capacity for the energy transition. This initiative will target priority rural areas including the Western Highlands, Alta Verapaz, and others as selected.

Countering corruption is a core national security interest and foreign policy priority. U.S. messaging, including by officials overseas, is essential to carrying out both the U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption and the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration. To support this commitment, the United States announced following the HLED that we will provide technical assistance to the Guatemalan executive branch, including the National Commission Against Corruption (CNC) and integrity units within certain ministries, to deter and prevent corruption, identify perpetrators, and issue recommendations to improve existing units, enhance staff capacity, and strengthen institutions.

The U.S. embassy also maintains channels of communication with the Guatemalan attorney general's office to facilitate coordination on specific cases with a U.S. national security nexus.

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Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols,
by Representative Salazar (No. 1 to No. 5),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 4:
The newly elected President of Panamá, José Raúl Molina, says that he will shut the Darien Gap. Is the State Department supporting initiatives to create physical barriers in the Darien Gap that will reduce the flow of migrants? Does the State Department believe a formal border crossing manned by Colombian and Panamanian migration officials and border guards on their respective sides would reduce the flow of migrants through the Darien Gap?

Answer 4:

The Department has engaged the governments of Colombia and Panama since the April 2023 Darién Surge to reduce irregular migration through the Darién. Jointly staffed outposts permit Panamanian and Colombian authorities to increase their presence along the busiest known migrant routes. We collaborate closely with Colombia and Panama in line with our commitment under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection to find humane solutions to irregular migration through the Darién. At all levels, we encourage Colombian and Panamanian counterparts to enhance collaboration with humanitarian organizations to maximize the impact of assistance and protect those in need

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by Representative Salazar (No. 1 to No. 5),
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Question 5:
We would like to know what proactive steps the State Department has taken to protect significant U.S. private sector investments, like those being made by Honduras Prospera. Further, what specific steps does the State Department intend to implement to protect and promote U.S. private sector interests in the future?

Answer 5:

The Department continues to encourage Honduras to work towards a fair, rules-based, and expeditious resolution of investment disputes in accordance with applicable law and any applicable international obligations, including investment agreements. The Department will continue to clearly convey that how Honduras handles its disputes with foreign investors both sends a strong signal to U.S. investors about the quality of the investment climate and directly impacts the government's ability to generate the inclusive economic growth that is in both our countries' interests.

Question for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Sherman (No. 1 to No. 1),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
Mr. Nichols and Mr. Robinson, how has the U.S. stepped up its efforts to counter Hezbollah's and Iran's influence, attempted terror and financial schemes in the region since October 7th? What further resources are needed to cut off Hezbollah's ability to operate in this region for good?

Answer 1:

The State Department has launched and led – jointly with the Department of Justice – several international fora to address the threat posed by Iran-linked terrorism. More than 30 governments from around the world participate in these fora, which have helped raise awareness and increase cooperation and cooperation in countering Iran and its proxies' terrorist and illicit activities.

State coordinates with and provides capacity-building for regional partners to counter Iran's and Hizballah's broader destabilizing activities, which include trade-based money laundering, soliciting donations from sympathizers, and expanding their support networks. We have demarched our partners on U.S. concerns regarding Iran's brutal suppression of its citizens, its lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as

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well as Tehran's continued destabilizing behavior in the Middle East. We have also engaged regional partners on Iran's broader influence operations and the threat they pose to Latin America.

We take seriously any efforts by other countries, including in the Western Hemisphere, to deepen military partnerships with Iran and strongly urge all countries to avoid engaging in transactions with Iran for military equipment or related items, which could subject entities and individuals to sanctions under multiple U.S. authorities.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Smith (No 1 to No. 15),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 1:
What levers is this Administration using to change the Cuban regime's appalling treatment of its own citizens? What actions have you taken, and have they succeeded? And what additional actions has this Administration taken to free the thousand political prisoners in Cuba? Has there been any progress?

Answer 1:

Human rights remain at the core of our engagement with Cuba. We consistently raise our concerns with the Cuban government and urge respect for the basic human rights of all Cuban citizens. We freeze assets and bar entry of Cuban officials who are responsible for gross violations of human rights. We also work closely with our allies and partners and ask them to use their influence to urge the Cuban government to release political prisoners and respect human rights. Finally, we work with the Cuban diaspora, business community, and civil society to raise awareness of the dire human rights situation in Cuba.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Brian Nichols and Assistant Secretary Todd Robinson,
by Representative Smith (No 1 to No. 15),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
June 12, 2024

Question 2:
What is this Administration doing to bring pressure to bear on the Ortega-Murillo regime in Nicaragua for its wanton human rights abuses? Are you seeing any progress? What Administration policy will offer a proportional response to the Ortega regime's repression and tyranny?

Answer 2:

The promotion of respect for human rights is a central goal of U.S. foreign policy. The United States remains committed to promoting accountability for the Ortega-Murillo regime's brutal repression of civil society and blatant disregard for human rights. To that end, the United States has imposed financial sanctions on 51 individuals and 13 entities and has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on more than 1,400 Nicaraguans for their role in a regime that represses civil society organizations, closes civic spaces, and unjustly detains courageous individuals. Additionally, the Department has added 49 Nicaraguans to the Section 353 "Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors" list for undermining democratic processes or institutions in Nicaragua. Since 2022, Secretary Blinken has designated

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Nicaragua as a Country of Particular Concern for its engagement in or tolerance of particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Beyond sanctions and visa revocations, the United States continues to sound the alarm on Ortega and Murillo's abuses of human rights through public and private channels, bilaterally and multilaterally, including at the Organization of American States, and we encourage our partners in and outside of the region to do the same. Parallel to these efforts, we continue to regularly engage with and amplify the work of Nicaraguan human rights defenders, journalists, and members of the political opposition to ensure their voices are not lost or dampened from the distance of exile or amid Ortega and Murillo's caustic rhetoric.

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by Representative Smith (No 1 to No. 15),
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
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Question 3:
Last month, the Biden Administration called out the Ortega-Murillo regime's dangerous weaponization of migration. As the announcement stated, "President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo have put in place permissive-by-design migration policies that have introduced opportunities for migrant smuggling and trafficking networks to exploit migrants for economic gain and fuel dangerous, irregular travel towards the U.S. southwest border." What is the Administration's short-term response to the regime's continued exploitation of migrants through Nicaragua? How is the U.S. working with other countries in the region to address this challenge?

Answer 3:

No one should profit on the desperation of vulnerable migrants – not smugglers, and certainly not public officials, governments, or authoritarian regimes. The Department's visa restriction policy under 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), enacted in 2023 and expanded in 2024, covers owners, executives, and/or senior officials of charter flight companies, ground and maritime transportation companies, travel agencies, and tour operators, who provide transportation and travel services designed primarily for travelers intending to irregularly migrate to the United States. Our early efforts in the Caribbean helped reduce certain charter flights to

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Managua transporting irregular migrants, and we seek to build on that success.

We continue to engage with the private sector and governments worldwide, and especially in the region, to eliminate this exploitative practice. On May 15, the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and the Treasury jointly issued a *Policy Alert on Disrupting Irregular Migration* to notify airlines, air charter operators, travel agents, and service providers of the U.S. government's efforts to promote responsible practices in the industry, prevent and disrupt illicit activity, and enhance compliance with lawful migration pathways.

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by Representative Smith (No 1 to No. 15),
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Question 4:
Last month, the Treasury Department announced new sanctions against companies in Nicaragua that have been benefitting and propping up the regime. These sanctions included Russian-owned companies in Nicaragua. What effect have these sanctions had so far? What has the response to them been? And what else will the Biden Administration do to counter the Nicaraguan military's deepening partnership with Russia?

Answer 4:

We are actively tracking Russia's efforts to increase its influence in the Western Hemisphere as it seeks to decrease its global isolation following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On May 15, the United States sanctioned the Training Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for its role in supporting the Nicaraguan National Police, a sanctioned entity involved in repressing the Nicaraguan people. We also sought assurances from other governments in the region to refrain from sending security personnel to the training center, to further prevent the spread of inhumane practices and mis- and disinformation. We closely monitor the Kremlin's support for Nicaragua, including its provision of military advisors, training and equipment, financial backing, and dissemination of disinformation.

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Posts in the region have engaged in a positive, values-based approach to strengthen partnerships and build resilience against Russian information manipulation. Current Public Diplomacy programming uses in-person programs, exchanges, diaspora outreach, media and digital literacy education, civil society training, and independent media investment to address the disinformation challenge.

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Question 5:
What are the USAID funding priorities for strengthening civil society's capacity to promote the restoration of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Answer 5:

USAID's new DRG Policy reaffirms and renews USAID's commitment to democratic governance and human rights by outlining approaches for enhancing the effectiveness of the United States' support for democratic development. Principle Four of the USAID DRG Policy[1] emphasizes mainstreaming prevention and protection for frontline democratic actors. USAID elevates civil society and other private actors as essential building blocks of democracy and development, including—non governmental organizations, journalists, universities, faith groups, labor unions, community organizations, business entities.

Under the interagency Voices initiative, USAID works with the State

[1] https://www.usaid.gov/policy/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/policy-guide

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Department and like-minded partners–governments in the region and the international community, civil society, the private sector, and others—to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America.

USAID has consulted closely with organizations to better understand risks they're facing and increased programming in Central America to meet some of these challenges to respond directly to the regional trends impacting civil society organizations and independent media and to concerns our partners have raised.

An example of this is a new suite of regional activities that aim to strengthen cross-border networks of independent media and civil society to expose corruption and offer medium-term protection for democracy activists, human rights defenders, and anticorruption champions from northern Central America and Nicaragua with fellowship opportunities at U.S. universities.

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Question 6:
For Haiti in particular, how will USAID funding and programming put the country back on the path to democratic elections—not held since 2016—and a rule of law that protects Haitians' human rights?

Answer 6:

USAID is implementing a five-year program to assist Haitian partner organizations to strengthen key democratic institutions and practices, including civil society stakeholders, the media, and government officials to increase trust, security, and inclusive participation in political processes and elections when conditions exist for them to be held. This support includes enhancing oversight and advocacy by civil society to improve the credibility of electoral and constitutional reform processes; support to Haitian media to improve fact-based reporting on the transition; and informing and strengthening the engagement of Haitian citizens and civil society groups in elections and political processes.

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Question 7:

Arms Trafficking: Gangs in Haiti have become increasingly powerful this year, having taken over most of the capital city Port-au-Prince, terrorized the population, and increasingly using U.S.-made military-grade weapons. What is the Administration doing to halt the flow of arms from the United States into the hands of gangs in Haiti? What about Mexican drug cartels?

Answer 7:

On February 13, 2024, Homeland Security Investigations and the Government of Haiti signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to formally establish the Haiti Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit (TCIU), which will facilitate the exchange of information between law enforcement partners in the United States and Haiti, and enhance cross-border investigative capabilities to prosecute those involved in transnational criminal activities, particularly gang-related criminal activity such as firearms trafficking.

In July 2023, Vice President Harris announced a new position within the Department of Justice, the first ever Coordinator for Caribbean Firearms

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Prosecutions. The Coordinator will support the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which established stiffer penalties for international weapons trafficking.

In September 2023, DHS initiated Operation Hammerhead in partnership with the CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit (CGIU). This is an interagency, multijurisdictional surge operation that has resulted in the seizure of hundreds of firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

In October 2023, the United States joined the UN Security Council's unanimous adoption of UNSCR 2700 that renewed an arms embargo on Haiti to prevent the supply, sale, or transfer to Haiti of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition. UNSCR 2700 also included targeted asset freeze and travel ban measures.

On November 16, 2023, Haiti entered into a memorandum of understanding with the United States to share firearms tracing data through the ATF eTrace system. All Caribbean partners are encouraged to enter recovered crime gun information into the eTrace system in a comprehensive

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and timely manner to identify the origins of U.S.-sourced crime guns and facilitate investigations and prosecutions of firearms traffickers.

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Question 8:
In August 2023, the Washington Post reported that Colombian President Gustavo Petro's son admitted that his father's campaign had received illicit funds from sources connected to Colombian narcotic traffickers. Please state what steps you have taken to investigate these claims, and what your assessment is with regard to Petro's personal culpability. Please provide names and positions of those who have been implicated in this scandal.

Answer 8:

The Colombian attorney general's office opened investigations into President Petro's eldest son, Nicolas Petro, and the president's brother for allegedly accepting irregular payments, some of which allegedly financed Petro's 2022 campaign. Those investigations are ongoing and until those investigations are complete, we cannot assess culpability.

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Question 9:
Please provide information as to the Petro Administration's dismantling of US-funded counter narcotics intelligence programs in Colombia and ending of eradication of cocoa crops. What steps did you and the INL bureau take to oppose this, providing any relevant cables and communications (in classified setting, as appropriate)? Have you discovered any nexus between illicit funding linked to narcotics traffickers and steps taken by the Petro Administration to benefit the narcotics industry in Colombia? If you have not, will you continue to investigate whether there is a nexus?

Answer 9:

Bilateral law enforcement and judicial cooperation remain strong. U.S.-funded programs also continue to help build Colombia's capacity to investigate and prosecute transnational criminal organizations, money laundering, and corruption. In September 2023, the Petro administration published Colombia's National Drug Policy, which recognizes eradication as a valuable and strategic tool. The Department has publicly and privately called for the Petro administration to reach its eradication targets and continues to support the work of Colombian eradication teams.

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Question 10:
The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its 2023 report indicated that there has been a significant increase in cocaine production and usage since 2021, coinciding with your tenure as Assistant Secretary. What do you attribute this to, and, given the role played by Colombia in global cocaine production and trafficking, do you see a linkage in this increase that is attributable to the Petro administration's change in drug policy?

Answer 10:

The Department attributes the multi-year increase in coca cultivation in Colombia to global demand for cocaine, fluctuations in Colombian policy approaches, COVID-19 disruptions, and peace process instability. Colombia aims to reduce coca cultivation by 40 percent and transition 50,000 small-scale coca farming families to the licit economy by 2026. The Petro administration maintains strong counternarcotics cooperation with the United States. Recent statistics show significant increases in cocaine and coca paste/base interdictions in early 2024 compared to 2023, with 2023 interdiction and lab destruction surpassing 2022 numbers.

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Question 11:
Does the State Department have a plan with respect to encouraging Guatemala to retain its current diplomatic recognition of Taiwan/Republic of China? If so, please provide details. If not, why not?

Answer 11:

The Department supports Taiwan's relationships with diplomatic partners in the Western Hemisphere. Taiwan is a reliable, likeminded, and democratic partner, and its partnerships around the world provide significant and sustainable benefits to the citizens of those countries, especially its diplomatic partners.

Direct investment, joint development initiatives, enhanced trade, and sector-specific projects aimed at economic growth in the region remain vital to a strong relationship between the Western Hemisphere and Taiwan. We support Taiwan's efforts to strengthen its diplomatic partnerships, including Guatemala. Support for democratic partners, such as Taiwan, can benefit Latin America and the Caribbean in the areas of health, education, equity,

and the economy. We will continue to promote the robust legislative and executive engagement that exists between Guatemala and Taiwan.

Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Ramiro Martínez attended the inauguration of President Lai on May 20 and discussed further strengthening bilateral relations. President Arévalo also participated in a May 21 virtual meeting with President Lai in which he offered support for Taiwan. In a statement on May 21, the Guatemalan foreign ministry noted that Guatemalan-Taiwan relations date back 89 years and are founded on democratic values and mutual respect.

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Question 12:
In an apparent effort to pressure Guatemala, the People's Republic of China banned the importation of Guatemalan coffee and macadamia nuts. What has the State Department done to counter this coercive practice? What tools are available to counter Chinese economic coercion of Guatemala and similarly-situated countries?

Answer 12:

Intimidating and coercive behavior by the PRC is unacceptable, and the Department stands with Guatemala. The U.S. embassy frequently meets with producers and exporters in Guatemala to promote inclusive economic growth, and the United States works to help all our partners increase their resilience to possible economic coercion. While Beijing claims it will reward countries that switch diplomatic ties, we have observed that these initial inducements tend to be short term, not fully met, and followed by sustained coercive behavior that increasingly seeks to constrain countries' sovereign choices. WHA staff can further brief, as needed, on steps taken and tools available to counter the PRC's coercive actions.

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Question 13:
What is the State Department doing to leverage its past support of then-candidate Arévalo during a contentious election process to ensure that it does not switch diplomatic recognition to the PRC?

Answer 13:

Supporting Guatemala's democratic process before, during, and after its 2023 presidential elections was a reflection of U.S. values and priorities. The Department continues to stand with Guatemalans in rejecting attempts by corrupt actors to sabotage President Arévalo's ability to govern.

The U.S.-Guatemala bilateral relationship has never been stronger. We are inspired by, and grateful for, President Arévalo's domestic and regional leadership. Recognition is a sovereign decision, and Guatemala has stated it will continue to recognize Taiwan. Guatemala remains a core U.S. partner in addressing the root causes of migration and countering illicit activities such as narcotics trafficking. Under President Arévalo, the Guatemalan government has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to addressing the country's weaknesses, such as endemic corruption and

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deep societal divisions. We continue to work hand in hand with democratic partners such as Taiwan to provide support to enhance Guatemala's security and prosperity.

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Question 14:
What is the State Department doing to promote greater awareness within Guatemala, particularly among opinion shapers such as journalists and policy makers such as politicians, about the positive aspects of Taiwan's democracy compared with the lack of respect for civil and political rights in the PRC?

Answer 14:

The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City promotes greater engagement and exchanges between Guatemala and Taiwan. For example, in July, the embassy helped facilitate a congressional visit led by the president of Guatemala's congress to Taiwan. The delegation met with President Lai and underscored Guatemala's support for Taiwan and its appreciation for support provided by Taiwan for education, health, and infrastructure in Guatemala. U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Tobin Bradley regularly raises the importance of the Taiwan relationship in meetings with the Guatemalan government, including President Arévalo and Foreign Minister Martinez, who in response have reiterated their support for Guatemala's relationship with Taiwan. The U.S. embassy in Guatemala also supports efforts of Taiwan

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trade missions to Guatemala and encourages Taiwan investment in Guatemala to promote high tech industries. We advance a positive agenda for the hemisphere that is based on shared values with our democratic partners – respect for human rights and diversity, democratic governance, inclusive economic growth and entrepreneurship, respect for labor rights, and the rule of law.

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Question 15:
Similarly, what is the State Department doing to raise awareness of some of the perils of engaging economically with China, such as the PRC's promotion of debt-trap diplomacy?

Answer 15:

The United States regularly engages with partner countries on the risks of certain PRC's practices. While we welcome investment in developing countries by any country that applies transparent, competitive, and market-driven approaches to development, we warn partners that Beijing's model promotes loans from PRC banks distributed to PRC contractors and that this can threaten the long-term development needs of recipient countries.

We also engage our partners to explain that the United States' transparent, private sector-driven model comes with a proven track record for funding economically-sound projects, delivering sustainable growth, reducing poverty, and fostering technological innovation. We will continue

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to work with partners to call out PRC practices, improve global transparency standards, press for changes in PRC behavior, and offer alternatives.

We are also building our partners' capacity to attract private sector funding and help partners establish open and transparent business environments that attract private sector investment. We promote tools and initiatives such as the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, and the Blue Dot Network.

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