

Chinese presence in Latin America worries US Senate

The growing presence of China in Latin America was considered Tuesday by the United States Senate concerned with Beijing's expanding interest in the region's energy resources.

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"There's no doubt that China is increasing its presence in Latin America and in the rest of the world. Between 1999 and 2004 Chinese imports to the region jumped six fold and the region's exports trebled", said Norm Coleman Republican Senator for Minnesota.

Gal Luft CEO of the Global Security Analysis Institute pointed out that "of all the regions where China is competing with United States for access to petroleum, the western hemisphere is probably the one that has greater impact in Washington and in the long term".

Mr. Luft added that since 1993, China has signed several energy agreements with Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Cuba.

Stephen Jonson, head of the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation warned about the growing "Socialist references" in Latin America and cautioned that if the Bolivian Indian leader Evo Morales and head of the coca planters' movement becomes president, "China would become the only acceptable buyer of Bolivian natural gas outside Latin America".

Senator Coleman who is also president of the Western Hemisphere "Peace Corps and Narcotics Affairs" Subcommittee of the Senate, pointed out that Chinese interest in Latin America also includes military cooperation.

"China is setting up and strengthening military programs in the region while United States looks how military relations are contracting because of differences over the Rome seated International Crime Court".

Senator Coleman finally highlighted that for the first time ever China has sent a military contingent to the region: 125 servicemen with the UN peace force operating in Haiti.