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## **CHINA**

# **China: Our goal is economic**

## **Despite strengthening trade ties, China said it had no plans to expand its influence in Latin America.**

**By Tim Johnson**

**Knight Ridder News Service**

**BEIJING** - Chinese officials have assured Washington that Beijing has no plans to seek greater influence in Latin America beyond expanding trade, a senior U.S. envoy said Friday.

The assurances underscore how China's global rise has heightened concerns about its activities in regions where Washington has long been dominant.

"In our conversations, the purpose was not to draw lines," Thomas Shannon, the assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, said of several days of talks with his Chinese counterparts. "Ultimately, in the region, it's up to individual countries to determine what kind of relationship they are going to have with China."

Shannon dismissed concerns, emanating in part from the Pentagon, that China is seeking to foster closer military relations with countries in Latin America.

"China's military engagement in the region is pretty light, by our standards," he said at a news conference. "China is not selling major military-weapons systems in the hemisphere."

China's trade with Latin America has more than doubled to about \$50 billion a year since 2000, still a small fraction of U.S. annual trade of about \$800 billion with the region.

But China's trade is growing fast. It said it plans to boost trade with the region to \$100 billion by 2010. It's also scouring the Western Hemisphere for oil and gas concessions, drawing it closer to Venezuela, a major U.S. supplier that has the greatest global energy reserves outside the Persian Gulf.

Shannon met with counterparts in the Communist Party's Central Committee and the Foreign Ministry, including Zeng Gang, who heads the department of Latin America affairs.

He said the two sides agreed to meet annually to discuss Latin America and that "our analysis and understanding of what is happening in the hemisphere kind of line up."

China accepts that nearly all of Latin America and the Caribbean have embraced democracy and free trade, he told a small group of reporters separately, and it offered assurances that it's "not operating in the region with the intent of exporting any kind of political model."

China has veered sharply toward capitalism since the late 1970s, but it's still ruled by the Communist Party, which has a monopoly grip on power.