

WESTERN HEMISPHERE READINESS SERIES · POLICY BRIEF 02

# Operationalizing the Economic Pillar of the Shield of the Americas

*Lessons from Colombia, Bolivia and Peru*

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**Purpose** — This brief examines how the Economic Pillar of the 22 September 2026 Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty — investment screening, diversified critical-minerals sourcing, and trusted-supplier digital infrastructure — can be translated from a diplomatic commitment into an operational program. It draws on three country-level applied cases already documented in the HRS Resilience Foundation's Country Readiness Assessment series: Colombia (CRA 04), Bolivia (CRA 05) and Peru (CRA 06), all three signatories of the Joint Statement. Core proposition: the Economic Pillar becomes operational when a common readiness methodology — not a one-off diplomatic commitment — is applied consistently across signatory countries, regardless of which foreign partner's capital is under discussion in any one of them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The Economic Pillar already has three applied test cases.** Colombia's Barranquilla Agreements, Bolivia's lithium-sector legal reform, and Peru's Chancay/submarine-cable dependency questions are not separate stories — they are the same policy problem appearing in three national contexts.
- **The common thread is not China, it is concentration.** Each country's readiness gap is best understood as infrastructure or resource concentration in a single foreign-linked asset, not as a bilateral contest between two governments.
- **Nationality-neutral screening is the operational core of the pillar.** Investment-screening mechanisms and trusted-supplier standards only function if applied consistently to every foreign partner, not selectively.
- **Legal and regulatory readiness, not capital alone, is the binding constraint.** In all three countries, the limiting factor has been institutional and legal capacity to screen and regulate, not the availability of interested capital.
- **A shared readiness methodology reduces duplicated diligence cost.** Applying one consistent framework across signatory countries lowers the cost, for governments and private partners alike, of assessing each new country and project individually.

## Executive Summary

On 22 September 2026, the United States and fourteen other Western Hemisphere governments — including Colombia, Bolivia and Peru — signed the Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty, committing to an Economic Pillar built on investment-screening mechanisms, diversified and reliable critical-minerals sourcing, and trusted-supplier regulations for digital infrastructure, applied on a non-discriminatory basis.[1] A joint statement, by itself, is a diplomatic commitment. It becomes policy only when translated into a repeatable operating method that signatory governments and their institutions can actually apply, country by country, project by project.

The HRS Resilience Foundation's Country Readiness Assessment series has, over the same period, independently produced exactly this kind of applied groundwork for three of the fourteen signatories. Colombia's CRA 04 documents a newly signed critical-minerals and civil-nuclear framework alongside a prior administration's unresolved Belt and Road entanglement. Bolivia's CRA 05 documents one of the world's largest identified lithium resource bases alongside a two-decade-old legal framework that has stalled its development. Peru's CRA 06 documents a functioning, Chinese-majority-owned megaport and an absent direct submarine cable to Asia, alongside a president censured for undisclosed meetings with Chinese business representatives. Read together, these are not three unrelated country stories. They are three instances of the same structural question the Economic Pillar exists to answer: how does a government screen and regulate strategic infrastructure and investment consistently, regardless of which country's capital is involved.

THE POLICY PROBLEM

Signatory governments have committed to investment screening and trusted-supplier standards, but each is approaching implementation independently, without a shared operational method or common readiness baseline.

THE OPERATIONAL GAP

Institutions may lack the legal, technical and screening capacity to apply the Economic Pillar's principles consistently — leaving each new foreign-investment decision to be renegotiated case by case, administration by administration.

The objective of this brief is not to propose a single regional regulatory regime. It is to show, using three already-documented applied cases, that a common readiness methodology can be adapted to each country's legal system, institutional structure and resource base while still delivering the consistency the Economic Pillar requires.

SECTION 01

The Economic Pillar and Why These Three Countries

The Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty establishes three pillars — Economic, Security, and Multilateral Coordination — and commits signatories to "defend our economies by enhancing economic cooperation; exploring investment screening mechanisms; safeguarding critical minerals supply chains through diversified and reliable sourcing; and promoting trusted supplier regulations for digital infrastructure, applied on a non-discriminatory basis." [1] Fourteen governments signed alongside the United States. Colombia, Bolivia and Peru are not selected here because they are the largest or most strategically prominent signatories. They are selected because, independently of this brief and prior to it, each already has a documented, applied readiness case addressing exactly the concentration and screening questions the Economic Pillar names.

| Country           | Applied Case                                                                                                                                          | Economic Pillar Dimension                                                                            |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Colombia (CRA 04) | Barranquilla Agreements (critical minerals, civil nuclear) signed 8 September 2026, alongside the prior administration's May 2025 Belt and Road entry | Critical-minerals diversification; institutional continuity across administrations                   |
| Bolivia (CRA 05)  | 23 million metric tons of identified lithium resources, among the world's largest, constrained by an unresolved state-monopoly extraction law         | Diversified critical-minerals sourcing; legal-framework readiness as precondition for capital        |
| Peru (CRA 06)     | Chancay megaport (60% COSCO-owned) and the absence of a direct Peru-Asia submarine cable                                                              | Trusted-supplier digital infrastructure; investment screening for strategic infrastructure ownership |

SECTION 02

Three Applied Cases, One Structural Question

**Colombia.** The Barranquilla Agreements commit both governments to build secure, diversified critical-minerals and rare-earths supply chains, and establish a civil nuclear cooperation framework — a direct, dated application of the Economic

Pillar's minerals and diversification language.[2] This sits alongside an unresolved institutional legacy: the previous administration's May 2025 accession to China's Belt and Road Initiative was never formally reversed, only politically superseded by a change of government. CRA 04's readiness question is therefore not "China or the United States" but whether Colombian institutions can apply consistent, transparent screening to infrastructure investment regardless of which administration, or which foreign partner, currently holds favor.[3]

**Bolivia.** Bolivia's identified lithium resources — approximately 23 million metric tons, confirmed by the U.S. Geological Survey's Mineral Commodity Summaries 2026 as among the world's largest such bases — represent exactly the kind of critical-mineral endowment the Economic Pillar names.[4] Yet two decades of state-monopoly extraction law, not a shortage of interested capital, have kept production at a fraction of commercial scale. CRA 05's central finding — "a resource endowment without resolved legal frameworks and social consent produces announcements, not production" — is a direct statement of why investment-screening and diversification commitments require legal-readiness work that a joint statement alone cannot supply.[5]

**Peru.** Chancay is the most concrete applied test of the Economic Pillar's trusted-supplier and screening language available in the current series: a functioning, majority-Chinese-state-owned megaport, with an active regulatory-oversight dispute now before Peru's Constitutional Court, and a parallel absence of direct Peru-Asia submarine cable connectivity.[6] CRA 06's proposition — consistent, transparent regulatory application regardless of ownership, paired with genuine alternate-capacity development — is the Economic Pillar's screening and trusted-supplier commitments applied to a single, real, dated case.[7]

SECTION 03

The Common Pattern

Across all three cases, the HRS Strategic Dependency Test — concentration, substitutability, control, recovery time, and cascading impact — identifies the same underlying structure: a strategic asset or resource concentrated with a single foreign partner, absent the domestic legal, technical or regulatory capacity to screen and diversify around it. The test is deliberately not directional. It applies with equal rigor to Chinese, American, or any other foreign partner, which is precisely what allows it to operationalize a "non-discriminatory basis" screening commitment rather than a one-sided one.

| Test Dimension | Colombia                                                                   | Bolivia                                                             | Peru                                                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Concentration  | Minerals/nuclear cooperation newly concentrated in one bilateral framework | Lithium resource concentrated in a single legally unresolved sector | Pacific transshipment concentrated in one majority-foreign-owned port |
| Control        | Institutional continuity across administrations untested                   | State-monopoly law unresolved for two decades                       | Regulatory-oversight dispute now before the Constitutional Court      |
| Readiness gap  | Consistent screening across administrations                                | Legal and technical validation before capital deployment            | Alternate capacity and route diversification                          |

HRS PROPOSITION

*The Economic Pillar is not primarily a China-containment instrument. It is a readiness standard: any signatory government that can consistently screen and regulate strategic infrastructure and investment — regardless of the partner's country of origin — has operationalized the pillar, whether or not a single Chinese-linked project is ever affected.*

SECTION 04

Five Policy Priorities

- 01 — Build screening capacity before, not after, the next concentrated asset.** Each country's readiness gap became visible only once a major asset (Chancay, the Colombia-China BRI accession, Bolivia's stalled lithium law) was already in place. Signatory governments should build investment-screening institutions proactively, not reactively.
- 02 — Apply the same standard to every partner.** A screening regime seen as targeting one country's capital while exempting another's will not sustain political support across administrations. The Colombia and Peru cases each illustrate the institutional cost of continuity gaps — an unresolved BRI legacy in Colombia and an ongoing regulatory-oversight dispute in Peru — reinforcing the value of a consistent, nationality-neutral standard applied across administrations.
- 03 — Separate legal-readiness work from capital-attraction messaging.** Bolivia's case shows that announcing openness to investment does not substitute for resolving the underlying legal framework. Signatory governments should sequence legal and regulatory readiness ahead of, or at minimum alongside, investment promotion.
- 04 — Treat alternate capacity as part of the screening commitment, not a separate initiative.** Peru's case shows that screening an existing concentrated asset is necessary but insufficient; genuine alternate capacity (a second port, a diversified cable route) is what converts a screening commitment into reduced strategic dependency.
- 05 — Use a shared methodology to reduce duplicated diligence cost.** A common readiness framework, applied consistently across signatory countries, lets governments, private investors, and multilateral partners assess new opportunities against a known standard rather than building new diligence frameworks for each country in isolation.

SECTION 05

An Implementation Framework

The five priorities translate into a practical sequence applicable to any Economic Pillar signatory, not only the three examined here.

| Phase               | Primary Activity                                                                                                         | Expected Output                    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Baseline         | Map strategic-infrastructure and critical-mineral assets against ownership concentration and legal-framework status.     | Country-level dependency baseline. |
| 2. Screen           | Apply nationality-neutral investment-screening criteria to existing and prospective foreign-linked assets.               | Prioritized screening findings.    |
| 3. Resolve          | Address legal and regulatory gaps identified (extraction law, tariff-oversight authority, ownership-transparency rules). | Investment-grade legal certainty.  |
| 4. Diversify        | Develop genuine alternate capacity — ports, cables, processing, generation — rather than relying on screening alone.     | Reduced single-point dependency.   |
| 5. Institutionalize | Embed screening and diversification as administration-independent regulatory practice.                                   | Durable readiness capability.      |

A PRACTICAL TEST QUESTION

*If a new strategic-infrastructure project were proposed tomorrow — a port, a cable, a mine — could the receiving government demonstrate, within weeks, who screens the ownership structure, against what criteria, and what alternate capacity exists if the project's terms or availability changed?*

SECTION 06

Measures That Matter

| Dimension                | Illustrative Measure                                                                                          |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Screening capacity       | Share of strategic-infrastructure assets reviewed under a documented, nationality-neutral screening standard  |
| Legal readiness          | Time from resource identification to resolved legal/regulatory framework                                      |
| Diversification          | Alternate-capacity share of total strategic throughput in a given sector (ports, cables, minerals processing) |
| Institutional continuity | Screening-institution continuity across changes of administration                                             |
| Consistency              | Whether screening criteria are documented to apply equally regardless of investor nationality                 |

For strategic partners — including the United States and multilateral institutions supporting the Economic Pillar — the most useful contribution is likely to be technical and legal capacity-building for screening institutions, not capital alone. All three applied cases in this brief show that the binding constraint has been institutional and legal readiness, not the availability of interested capital from any direction.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The Economic Pillar of the Shield of the Americas will be judged not by the text of the 22 September 2026 Joint Statement, but by whether its signatories can apply its principles consistently, country by country, as new strategic-infrastructure and critical-mineral questions arise. Colombia, Bolivia and Peru already provide three independently documented, applied cases showing what that consistency requires in practice: proactive screening capacity, legal readiness ahead of capital promotion, genuine alternate capacity rather than screening alone, and institutional continuity that survives a change of government. A shared readiness methodology — applied, not merely declared — is what converts the joint statement signed by the United States and fourteen other governments into a durable hemispheric economic-security architecture.

POLICY TAKEAWAY

*The strategic objective for the Economic Pillar's next phase should be methodological consistency: the same screening standard, legal-readiness sequencing, and diversification discipline applied to every signatory country and every foreign partner, so that the pillar's credibility does not depend on any single country's political alignment in any given year.*

BACK MATTER

Selected References and Evidence Base

The analytical framing in this brief draws on the HRS Resilience Foundation's Country Readiness Assessment series and current official hemispheric security documentation. The recommendations are HRS analytical recommendations; they are not presented as official policy of any government or external organization.

[1] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman. Joint Statement on Defending Hemispheric Sovereignty. 22 September 2026.

[2] U.S. Department of State. Memoranda of Understanding on Critical Minerals Supply Chains and Civil Nuclear Cooperation with Colombia (Barranquilla Agreements). 8 September 2026.

[3] HRS Resilience Foundation. Country Readiness Assessment 04 — Colombia: Institutional Readiness, Critical Infrastructure, Earthquake Recovery and Strategic Minerals Security. September 2026.

[4] U.S. Geological Survey. Mineral Commodity Summaries 2026 — Lithium. February 2026.

[5] HRS Resilience Foundation. Country Readiness Assessment 05 — Bolivia: Institutional Readiness, Critical Minerals Security and Economic Realignment. September 2026.

[6] La República (Peru). Puerto de Chancay: Poder Judicial admite recurso de Cosco y disputa con Ositrán llegará al Tribunal Constitucional. 3–4 August 2026.

[7] HRS Resilience Foundation. Country Readiness Assessment 06 — Peru: Institutional Readiness, Strategic Infrastructure and Hemispheric Supply-Chain Security. September 2026.

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