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U.S. Resourcing to National Security Interests in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Context of Adversary Activities in the Region



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About This Report

The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the Department of Defense to commission an independent review of the sufficiency of resources available to pursue U.S. national security objectives in the Western Hemisphere (which, in the context of this report, refers to Latin America, the Caribbean, and contiguous waterways). Specifically, the legislation calls for U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Southern Command, the State Department, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to be included in the analysis. To provide additional context, the legislation also called for an overview of the activities and investments of China, Russia, and Iran in the region.

In an era of evolving global security threats and adversaries with increasing international ambitions, U.S. strategic priorities are undergoing a transition. Resource allocation, the balance between mission sets, and performance expectations among the combatant commands and other stakeholder agencies are being reviewed to promote the likelihood of success against both transnational criminal organizations and strategic military competitors.

The research reported here was completed in September 2021 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

In conducting this research, the authors followed Human Subject Protections (HSP) protocols in accordance with the appropriate statutes and U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regulations governing HSP. Both the authors' and their anonymous sources' views are solely their own and do not represent the official policy or position of DoD or the U.S. government.

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Summary

Issue

Despite being in the United States’ “neighborhood,” Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has typically not been a priority region for U.S. national security objectives. Particularly in the post–Cold War period, the threats emanating from the region have largely been perceived to be tied to narcotics and other illicit trafficking. Because of this, the geographic combatant commands (GCCs) charged with the region—U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)—have typically received fewer resources than their counterparts. Likewise, in terms of funding allocated toward supporting national security efforts, the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) tend also to dedicate lower amounts of resources to the region. This posture may need to be reassessed, especially in light of the increased activities and investments made in the region by adversaries in the context of great-power competition.

Approach

To assess the sufficiency of resourcing to U.S. national security efforts in LAC, we first reviewed a host of strategic guidance documents issued at the national and departmental levels, as well as by NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM. We also conducted an in-depth review of the goals and objectives of China, Russia, and Iran in the region and the ways in which each adversary is pursuing them. We relied on interlocutors at NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM, the State Department, and USAID to provide the latest data pertaining to funding and budget requests, manning, and other relevant depictions of resourcing levels and the processes that help determine them. The primary source of data for identifying and assessing resourcing needs, however, is the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders throughout the national security community. In all, more than 40 civilian and military respondents from the Department of Defense (DoD), State Department, and USAID based in Washington or affiliated with one of the GCCs participated in not-for-attribution interviews. Of these, nearly ten were “senior officials” who hold the rank of general or admiral, or the civilian equivalent. We also interviewed multiple subject-matter experts familiar with U.S. policy in LAC and/or the activities and objectives of U.S. adversaries in the region.

Findings

- U.S. strategic guidance has gaps with regard to the two most prominent threats to U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere: transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and

great-power competition (GPC). TCOs are becoming more prevalent, both as an analytical category and as a phenomenon on the ground throughout the hemisphere, but how they threaten U.S. interests and how efforts against them should be prioritized have not yet been definitively articulated in national strategy. Furthermore, TCOs tie into GPC concerns because they provide global adversaries with a conduit for contesting U.S. national security interests in the region. This point, however, is often ignored in discussions of GPC strategy and the allocation of resources, despite clear evidence that identified adversaries, especially China, have increased their investments and activities in the region.

- Competition with China is qualitatively and quantitatively different from competition with Russia and Iran in LAC:
 - Moscow and Tehran remain very opportunistic and are highly dependent on political contingencies for government-to-government engagements (e.g., anti-U.S. governments assuming power) and on illicit networks/ungoverned spaces.
 - Conversely, Beijing is implementing comprehensive, large-scale, and multidomain (diplomatic, economic, military, cultural) global plans that include LAC as an increasingly important component. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) engages and has growing influence with traditional U.S. partners, and its potential commitments are highly enticing to them.
- Adversaries engage in information operations and pursue network effects of shared content across state-operated/owned or state-controlled channels and websites. Information operations can be conducted with a very low cost and high return on investment and have a multiplier effect when coordinated with other types of engagement by adversary governments.
- The PRC emphasizes relationship-building at all levels, which gains it access and influence in the short term while also promoting lasting long-term investment. Even informal building and maintaining of relationships (e.g., via virtual outreach) can develop expectations of reciprocation in addition to promoting anti-U.S. narratives. It is unclear, however, how successful language institutes and other cultural initiatives are compared with media and information operations approaches.
- Regarding authorities, changes made to Title 10 security cooperation authorities in the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act are largely seen as necessary and appear to have improved interagency coordination efforts. These changes have improved interagency coordination efforts, and DoD and State representatives are now better positioned to identify the appropriate authority to utilize to achieve a desired end state and to align priorities with five-year country plans. However, resource allocation processes remain very time-consuming and bureaucratic, and authorities do not explicitly address how to prioritize GPC.
- Sustaining regular engagement with partner nations is a persistent concern for U.S. officials in LAC, and there may be opportunities to find ways to increase and routinize such efforts in the region. Programs for which relatively small budgetary increases or more stable allocations could have significant effects include exercise programs; the

Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster Assistance, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) program; and the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Title 22 account.

- The size and perhaps the composition of the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM staffs appear insufficient to sustain the level of partner-nation engagement necessary to compete in a GPC context.

Recommendations

- At the national and department levels, U.S. officials should more comprehensively define what constitutes a TCO and the ways in which TCOs threaten U.S. interests. This should include the ways in which they both directly and indirectly enhance the ability of adversaries to threaten U.S. interests. This assessment should also provide clearer guidance on how measures to counter TCOs should be prioritized among other threats to U.S. national security.
- At the national and departmental levels, guidance should go beyond existing programs to assign and apportion forces and direct how GPC will be implemented regionally and operationally. This guidance should be based on analysis of how current missions and activities contribute to GPC objectives and the likely impact of new or additional measures. Guidance should also clarify the roles of all GCCs and regional bureaus in identifying risks and opportunities in their areas of responsibility and in actively contributing to global GPC strategies and plans.
- Appropriate representatives from Congress and DoD should collaborate on a comprehensive review of current authorities that regulate GCC funding for partner-nation engagement, particularly those tied to security cooperation and humanitarian and related assistance, in the context of renewed adversarial activities in the competition space. This should include considering how to make some Title 10 authorities more flexible and responsive to changing conditions on the ground, seeking ways to better align authorities with lines of funding, and revising legacy authorities, such as those pertaining to counternarcotics, if they are leading GCCs to pursue resources to satisfy current priorities via indirect methods.
- Stakeholders within DoD should review any updates to personnel requirements at the GCC level to improve their effectiveness at executing their respective missions in the context of GPC.
- Interagency stakeholders should conduct a review of the current IMET program in the context of GPC. This should include a reassessment of how the absorptive capacity of partner nations is determined, as well as ways IMET opportunities can be utilized as a more targeted means of developing a certain capacity with a particular partner.
- Congress and DoD should consider ways to make annual resourcing levels more predictable, such as by establishing a baseline amount of funding and access to rotational forces. This would have the added benefit of alleviating pressure from small staffs who currently devote significant time to various resource proposal processes.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Background

Section 1265 of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to commission an independent review of the sufficiency of resources available to pursue U.S. national security objectives in the Western Hemisphere (which, in the context of this report, refers to Latin America, the Caribbean, and contiguous waterways). Specifically, the legislation calls for U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to be included in the analysis.

In an era of evolving global security threats and adversaries with increasing international ambitions, U.S. strategic priorities are undergoing a transition, necessitating an analysis of resources, the balance between mission sets, and performance expectations among the geographic combatant commands (GCCs) and other stakeholder agencies to ensure that resource allocations support the continued success against continuing growth of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and international military strategic competition.

Objective and Scope

The objective of this report is to provide insights on the degree to which NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM, the State Department, and USAID are appropriately resourced to carry out their respective national security–related missions in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and to provide a comparative overview of how key adversaries are pursuing their own strategic objectives.¹ Factors considered include recent updates to national, DoD, and State strategic guidance, the interpretation of this guidance at the GCC and bureau levels in their own guidance documents, the mission sets that each GCC and bureau pursues, and, finally, a categorized review of the resources each GCC and bureau has at its disposal to pursue its efforts. Notably, this report does not provide a comprehensive comparison of all combatant commands (CCMDs) and regional bureaus. Therefore, the findings and recommendations highlighted in this report do not include suggestions on how or from where perceived shortfalls in resourcing can or should be made available. Additionally, this report does not provide direct or in-depth analysis of certain national security concerns to which the efforts of these agencies and entities contribute but that fall outside of their respective priorities, such as illegal immigration.

¹ See Appendix A for pertinent language from Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 NDAA, Section 1265. Within the scope of this research, the inclusion of NORTHCOM is limited to its area of responsibility south of the U.S. border, specifically Mexico and the Bahamas and contiguous waterways.

While this report incorporates the points cited in the congressional requirement, it represents neither a forensic accounting of the funding provided to each GCC and bureau nor an exhaustive list of every funding authority potentially available to them. Rather, this report describes (1) the insights of a wide array of stakeholders intimately familiar with certain aspects of the processes and procedures that contribute to the resourcing of these departments and entities and (2) the broad structure of resourcing authorities, be they departmental or legislative.

Methods and Challenges

To adequately assess the extent to which SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM are sufficiently resourced, one must first consider the guidance and expectations conveyed from higher echelons, as well as the mission sets that SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM conduct. To this end, we reviewed a host of strategic guidance documents issued at the national and departmental levels and by SOUTHCOM, NORTHCOM, as well as the Department of State/USAID *Joint Regional Strategy* for the Western Hemisphere.² For the overview of adversary objectives and activities, we relied on a wide array of open sources, including monographs, U.S. government and think tank reports, and news articles.³ One data-related challenge is that DoD does not provide comprehensive GCC-level budget data. Because of this, although budget data pertaining to NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM were provided by the respective commands, we were limited in the extent to which we could provide broad context across all GCCs. Thus, many of the figures in this report display NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM data as a percentage of overall expenditures (which are presented in DoD budget data). Similar dependencies on GCC-provided data extend to areas such as staffing and exercises.

The primary source of data for this research, however, is the perspectives of a host of stakeholders in the Pentagon, at main State, at USAID Headquarters, and affiliated with the respective GCCs. In all, more than 40 respondents participated in not-for-attribution interviews. Of these, nearly ten senior officials hold the rank of general, admiral, or a civilian equivalent. Many of these interlocutors also provided the latest data pertaining to funding and budget requests, personnel, and other relevant depictions of resourcing levels and the processes that help determine them. Additionally, we interviewed a handful of subject-matter experts (SMEs) knowledgeable about U.S. policy in LAC and/or the activities and objectives of China, Russia, and Iran in the region. Many of the views presented in this report come directly from the interviewees and do not necessarily represent our own analysis on a particular matter.

² U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Joint Regional Strategy*, January 3, 2019.

³ We also accessed and reviewed numerous classified documents pertaining to U.S. strategic priorities and objectives, deliberations on resourcing requirements, and the activities of adversaries in the region. After doing so, we determined that sufficient detail on the first two points could be adequately conveyed in an unclassified report. On the last point, it was determined that the requirement could also be met in an unclassified report and that expanding the research in greater detail would require a classified annex.

Most of the challenges in following this methodology were a result of the complexity of the U.S. government’s overall resource-management system. A single, large effort designed to increase a partner’s capabilities or capacity in a specific function is likely to involve both Defense (Title 10 U.S. Code) and State (Title 22) appropriations, with DoD funds appropriated to multiple services or joint commands, under multiple authorities. These funds are allocated through different systems, under different timelines, for activities conducted by personnel from different services, from active and reserve components, who deploy in the region for different periods of time. Tracking all the resources allocated to all programs in a region, let alone assessing their cumulative sufficiency, at times gives the impression of a fool’s errand—but it remains a critical effort for DoD during this time of strategic transition.

Finally, because of restrictions tied to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), we were unable to travel to conduct in-person interviews. As a result, all engagements were done remotely and suffered from degradation of communication common to all virtual platforms. This poses no direct tangible challenge to the research, though not being onsite likely diminished opportunities for RAND personnel to engage spontaneously with personnel omitted from the initial list of interviewees but whose perspectives could have added value.

Organization of This Report

To determine whether a GCC is sufficiently resourced, one must first gain insight on what the strategic guidance and expectations are for the command and the activities for which it is responsible. To ensure cohesion and comprehensiveness, this report follows an “ends, ways, means” format to build the analysis of the resources provided and the allocation process for SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM. In Chapter 2, we examine major environmental factors in the Western Hemisphere that affect U.S. national security interests, the strategic guidance issued by the White House, Pentagon, and Department of State relevant to the region, and how each GCC/bureau interprets this guidance into its own guidance and priorities. In Chapter 3, we review the objectives of China, Russia, and Iran in the region and the steps each is taking to both pursue its interests and contest those of the United States. In Chapter 4, we examine the resourcing available to SOUTHCOM, NORTHCOM, State, and USAID to pursue U.S. national security interests in LAC and discuss some of the challenges and concerns voiced by stakeholders. Finally, in Chapter 5 we review the preceding chapters, highlight the main themes, and provide a list of findings and recommendations for consideration.

Chapter 2. Western Hemisphere Considerations and U.S. National Security Interests

This chapter’s purpose is two-fold: to briefly discuss regional trends that affect U.S. interests and highlight how strategic guidance at the national and departmental level permeates through U.S. government policies, programs, and activities. As the principal U.S. geostrategic focus has changed over recent decades (Europe and Communism during the Cold War, the Middle East and terrorism post-9/11, and now Asia and great-power competition [GPC]), LAC has remained a key region of importance for U.S. strategic policy. In addition to its location adjacent to the continental United States, strong economic, political, and cultural ties with the region establish the parameters through which U.S. policy maneuvers. Additionally, nonstate actors chiefly drive threats to the United States and its interests, but activities by internal and external states also present unique challenges. Furthermore, as threats evolve, so does security strategic guidance. Therefore, understanding current environmental dynamics affecting U.S. interests and security strategy to counter threats helps inform the subsequent chapters of this report.

Setting the Stage: Trends, Opportunities, and Threats in Latin America and the Caribbean

Multiple factors shape recent dynamics in LAC that have implications for DoD in the coming years. In this section, we summarize the principal issues that influence U.S., regional, and U.S. adversary policy, highlighting recent trends and establishing how the region intersects with larger global trends and actors.

Transnational Criminal Organizations and Corruption

One of the clearest takeaways from numerous discussions with U.S. officials regarding resource issues in the Western Hemisphere is the substantial amount of money, personnel, and effort afforded to the counternarcotics mission. Yet this represents only one facet of the comprehensive threat posed by TCOs: Even if the domestic and regional threats stemming from narcotics were significantly reduced through improved drug policies, TCOs and other networks that fuel and benefit from the illegal drug trade would still pose significant threats because of their engagement in weapon trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering, illegal mining,⁴ and extortion.⁵ All of this has a broader detrimental impact, as the violence propagated by TCOs

⁴ Craig Faller, “Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 116th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee,” January 30, 2020.

⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

“threatens citizen security, undermines basic human rights, cripples the rule of law through corruption, erodes good governance, and hinders economic development.”⁶ When combined with a lack of economic opportunities and already weak governance in many parts of LAC, TCOs also represent a significant factor in LAC citizens’ decisions to emigrate from their home countries.⁷

One civilian official classified the TCO threat as an “extra-hemispheric asymmetric problem” because of TCOs’ ability to cause destabilization through involvement in a host of illicit activities beyond narcotics trafficking, although the latter has historically been the U.S. government’s primary focus when confronting these organizations.⁸ Complicating the situation, containing TCOs operating in LAC often challenges the capacity of regional security forces. According to one senior official, TCOs often “have a stronger end strength and higher budget than the security forces they face” and “survive off the corruption that is rampant” in the region.⁹

TCO activities in LAC also support violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in the region, including Hezbollah, al Qaeda, Hamas, the Islamic State,¹⁰ and other malign actors that seek direct pathways to the United States.¹¹ One senior official suggested that there is evidence that TCOs could pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland in certain circumstances. According to them, there are some data suggesting that “VEOs are trying to take advantage of TCOs because they’re so well-organized and embedded. They have essentially become insurgencies in [some] partner nations.”¹² At the same time, U.S. government reports often emphasize that VEO use of TCO routes into the United States appears to be very rare and is currently more a risk than a fact.¹³ In the case of Mexico, the most recent State Department *Country Reports on Terrorism* stated, “In 2019, there was no credible evidence indicating international terrorist groups established bases in Mexico, worked directly with Mexican drug cartels, or sent operatives via Mexico into the United States,” while still recognizing that the border remains vulnerable.¹⁴

Although rarely an existential threat to the United States, TCOs may pose a more serious threat to America’s LAC partners. As another official noted, “If strong partners and allies is central to our strategy, we must meet them where they are,”¹⁵ implying that the United States should more explicitly incorporate country-specific concerns and objectives when determining

⁶ U.S. Southern Command, “Counter Threats,” webpage, undated-a.

⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁸ Interview with civilian official, June 7, 2021.

⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

¹⁰ Jorge A. Rivera, *Iranian Influence in Latin America*, Army University Press, July 19, 2019; Karen DeYoung, “Pompeo Focuses on Iran and Hezbollah at Latin America Counterterrorism Conference,” *Washington Post*, July 19, 2019.

¹¹ Faller, 2020.

¹² Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

¹³ Jeff Seldin, “US Officials Reject Claims Terrorists Trying to Enter from Mexico,” *Voice of America*, March 17, 2021.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*, 2019.

¹⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

its engagement plans, many of which include a TCO component. Finally, as SOUTHCOM commander Admiral Craig Faller stated during Capitol Hill testimony in March 2021, the crime and instability fostered by TCOs in parts of the region exacerbates the challenges presented by illegal immigration to the United States.¹⁶ Thus, countering TCOs is itself an important component of homeland defense¹⁷ and America's commitment toward its partners. SOUTHCOM, well aware of this responsibility, actively combats these threats by sharing information, supporting LAC partner law enforcement operations, and disrupting TCO networks.¹⁸

However, this mission now takes on an even greater significance within the context of GPC. When TCOs and gangs pay bribes to LAC officials, corrupt practices are normalized and provide opportunities for bad-faith actors from China, Russia, and Iran to insert themselves into business and governance structures at all levels. American representatives, held to U.S. standards and values, then find it more difficult to compete against those willing to bribe officials. One U.S. official suggested that the presence of TCOs, weak governance, and the associated corruption is the primary explanation for the region's openness to U.S. adversary engagement.¹⁹ As "billion-dollar industries," TCOs provide an opportunity for U.S. adversaries to increase their respective influence via economic competition, influence operations, and other exploitative measures. "That is the definition of unrestricted warfare," argued one official.²⁰

Another civilian official contended that the threats posed by TCOs and the increased activity and access of China, Russia, and Iran are connected in ways that are not fully appreciated. According to them, "There is a direct linkage to what these organizations [TCOs] are doing in our backyard and how that affects access and influence by external state actors."²¹ Such instability contributes to weak and vulnerable institutions that can be exploited by these state actors seeking influence unencumbered by regulations tied to factors like human rights or representative government. As the official concluded, "Although the bad guys aren't doing kinetic operations, they're doing a lot of things with soft power to manipulate the fragile democracies."²² Not only does China benefit from the same conditions as TCOs, such as corruption, but in some areas it enables these conditions to flourish. For example, in his March

¹⁶ U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Testimony on United States Southern Command and United States Northern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2022 and the Future Years Defense Program*, Washington, D.C., March 16, 2021.

¹⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

¹⁸ U.S. Southern Command, undated-a.

¹⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

²⁰ Interview with civilian official, June 7, 2021.

²¹ Interview with civilian officials, April 12, 2021.

²² Interview with civilian officials, April 12, 2021.

2021 testimony to Congress, Faller provided evidence accusing China of being the number one source of money laundering to TCOs in Latin America.²³

A senior SOUTHCOM official argued that there is a gap in strategic guidance when it comes to the threat posed by TCOs. This official pointed out that while the National Security Strategy (NSS) released in December 2017 made multiple mentions of TCOs and included a section entitled “Dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations,” the National Defense Strategy (NDS) completed the following year mentioned them only twice. “It was a blind spot,” the senior official said of the discrepancy.²⁴

Instead, in the NDS the TCO threat was amalgamated into a section on empowered nonstate actors.²⁵ As a result, the issue “got ignored a bit” and it took a couple of years of advocacy on the part of senior leaders with a focus on Western Hemisphere issues to press for more explicit recognition. This, in these senior leaders’ estimation, has helped elevate the threat posed by TCOs as a larger priority in the Pentagon along with China, Russia, and VEOs. These and other interviewees, however, noted that this could once again change if the strategic guidance currently being drafted by the Biden administration and stakeholder agencies does not explicitly list TCOs among priority threats. As one civilian official put it, U.S. strategic recognition and prioritization of TCOs are akin to a “sine wave” that consistently follows an up and down path.²⁶ However, a senior SOUTHCOM official noted that the term *TCO* is now slowly being adopted by other agencies and stakeholders outside SOUTHCOM.²⁷

The Spread of Great-Power Competition to Latin America and the Caribbean

In the face of enduring challenges posed by TCOs, corruption, and cases of democratic backsliding, threats emanating from U.S. adversaries’ activities, as understood under the rubric of GPC, have risen considerably in recent years. In Chapter 3, we discuss the ends, ways, and means of three U.S. adversaries in the region—China, Russia, and Iran—as well as general overall trends in much greater detail; in this section, we briefly summarize the three U.S. adversaries and their activities in the region.

Above all, China’s power and influence in LAC represents the largest growth among the three U.S. adversaries operating in the region. China has chiefly centered its activity along commercial channels (e.g., bilateral trade, loans and financing, investments, construction projects), which often intersect with its political goals (e.g., countering recognition of Taiwan, support in international forums) and, to a lesser extent, military ambitions (e.g., arms sales,

²³ Craig Faller, “Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 117th Congress,” Senate Armed Services Committee, March 16, 2021.

²⁴ Interview with senior SOUTHCOM official, May 19, 2021.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2018, pp. 3 and 10.

²⁶ Interview with civilian official, June 7, 2021.

²⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

potential to distract U.S. forces in a conflict in Southeast Asia). Policymakers and analysts focused on China, Latin America, and their intersection debate whether China's activities in LAC represent genuine threats to U.S. national security or U.S. interests and, if so, to what extent and how. Most agree that China will play an increasingly dominant role in the region in the coming decades, which could have negative consequences for the United States.

Russian activities and interests in LAC, building off the relations established and maintained by the Soviet Union, are less wide-reaching and robust than those of China. Principally, Russia has fewer strategic interests in the region, which partially explains why many consider Russian activities as opportunistic, with relatively low costs to Moscow. For example, Russian arms sales, which play a significant role in supporting the Russian military's financing, have chiefly commercial ends, with more limited strategic purposes. Yet, Russia's strategic reach into the region has not entirely dissipated despite being concentrated in select countries. Most notable are Russia's relationships with former Soviet-era allies, such as Cuba and Nicaragua; more recently, Russia's relationship with the Maduro regime in Venezuela; and Russia's opportunistic outreach to nations such as Bolivia and Ecuador, particularly when ruling governments shift toward leftist and authoritarian directions. The Russian playbook of partnering with illiberal governments has only grown in the region (and globally), with Russian economic, political, and military support to Venezuela serving as the paradigm of what Russia is still capable of pursuing in the region.

As the traditionally least-engaged U.S. adversary in the region, Iran's few activities in LAC have seen a decline following the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2013. Principally, Iran has very weak economic, cultural, and religious ties with countries in the region. That said, analysts have documented Iranian efforts to engage the Shi'a diaspora in the region and support a limited network of terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah, that are reported to operate in a number of ungoverned spaces in South America. With the few allies with which Iran maintains good relations, a significant portion of the bilateral activities attempt to agitate U.S. policy objectives. For example, Venezuela has been a reliable partner for Iran's defense industry, supporting operatives of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Qods Force (IRGC-QF) and intelligence officials, helping to circumvent sanctions, and engaging in other activities counter to U.S. interests. Iran has also found Bolivia to be a promising commercial and defense partner in recent years and still seeks to expand its influence in other parts of the region. However, there is less evidence to suggest that robust state-to-state relationships have formed or are forming elsewhere.

An Evolving Crisis—the COVID-19 Pandemic

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the worst and most widespread disaster in this century: The virus has officially killed millions, unofficially killed many more, and has caused incredible grief and hardship for billions. In LAC, the virus has been particularly devastating. The region's social, economic, and political conditions have become a force multiplier in amplifying the devastation of the pandemic. A high prevalence of health risk

factors, large health systems gaps, struggling economies rife with poverty and inequality, and systemic corruption have made LAC significantly more vulnerable to the negative consequences of the pandemic relative to other regions. Most importantly, the underlying issues exposed by the pandemic highlight broader structural issues that the region will face even after the virus is under control.

From small Caribbean island nations, such as Jamaica²⁸ and Barbados,²⁹ to large continental countries, such as Brazil,³⁰ Mexico,³¹ and Colombia,³² the consequences of COVID-19 have been extremely bad. First and foremost, many people—often those with low income and/or part of marginalized communities (related to race, migrant status,³³ and gender)—have died. LAC is home to 8 percent of the world’s population but has accounted for 20 percent of recorded cases and almost 30 percent of recorded deaths.³⁴ In Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Panama, COVID-19 was the number one cause of death in 2020.³⁵ It is clear that the amount of human loss is unequivocally devastating, especially considering that experts at the UN³⁶ and doctors in the region³⁷ believe that current reporting mechanisms have vastly undercounted the true number of virus-caused deaths.

Additionally, the pandemic and the resulting disruptions to the economy have been unprecedented and comparatively more severe. The International Monetary Fund predicts that the region’s economy will have contracted by 8.1 percent in 2020, which is a significantly worse outlook in comparison to other emerging market areas around the world.³⁸ The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which forecasted LAC’s economy to contract

²⁸ “Jamaica Health Ministry Concerned About Rise in COVID-19 Cases,” *Caribbean National Weekly*, January 4, 2021.

²⁹ “Barbados Health Officials Say Spike in COVID-19 Cases Is a Shock to Health System,” *Caribbean National Weekly*, January 11, 2021.

³⁰ Rodrigo Pedroso and Zamira Rahim, “Brazilian officials Were Warned Six Days in Advance of a Looming Oxygen Crisis in Manaus,” CNN, January 19, 2021.

³¹ Dale Quinn and Maya Averbuch, “Mexico Covid Deaths Rise by a Record 1,803 as Virus Surges,” Bloomberg, January 21, 2021.

³² “Colombia COVID-19 Deaths Climb Past 50,000, Cases Close on 2 Million,” Reuters, January 21, 2021.

³³ United Nations High Commission for Refugees United Nations High Commission for Refugees and International Organization for Migration, “Urgent Support Needed as COVID-19 Inflicts Hardship on Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela,” press release, May 12, 2020.

³⁴ “Where the Pandemic Clobbered Economies Hardest,” *The Economist*, January 1, 2021.

³⁵ Jason Beaubien, “Chart: COVID-19 Is Now Leading Killer in 5 Latin American Nations,” NPR, December 18, 2020.

³⁶ Luis Felipe López-Calva, “A Greater Tragedy Than We Know: Excess Mortality Rates Suggest That COVID-19 Death Toll Is Vastly Underestimated in LAC,” United Nations Development Programme Latin America and the Caribbean, July 7, 2020.

³⁷ Oliver Griffin, “Coronavirus Surges on Colombia’s Caribbean Coast, Doctors Warn Deaths Underreported,” Reuters, July 5, 2020.

³⁸ Joaquín Cottani, “The Effects of Covid-19 on Latin America’s Economy,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 18, 2020.

by 7.7 percent in 2020, notes that the contraction will be the largest in 120 years.³⁹ Most importantly, these contractions are particularly painful because they will affect people who are already incredibly vulnerable. According to the UN, the pandemic could push 45 million people into poverty and significantly contribute to food insecurity.⁴⁰ In the context of climate change-driven natural disasters, pre-pandemic economic conditions, and other factors, these economic declines will cut extremely deep.

On average, people in the region face a greater threat from COVID-19 because of high levels of risk factors for poor health that make the virus more lethal. Statistics gathered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest that risk factors for poor health, including smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, and access to basic sanitation, are endemic to the region.⁴¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that many of these conditions, including others not listed here, make adults of any age with these conditions at “increased risk of severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19.”⁴² The high number of severe cases and deaths are indicative of the widespread presence of these underlying medical conditions in the region.

Although the region has greatly improved its health care systems compared with a few decades ago⁴³—Brazil is a great example⁴⁴—there are still significant gaps that have exacerbated the consequences of the pandemic. For one, countries in the region spend comparatively less money on health care than other regions. Out of a study of 17 countries in Latin America, only Chile spent more than 4 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care in 2018.⁴⁵ In comparison, the United States spent 17.7 percent in 2019;⁴⁶ the UK spent 10.0 percent in 2018;⁴⁷ China spent 5.35 percent in 2018;⁴⁸ and South Africa spent 8.1 percent in 2017.⁴⁹ However, it is

³⁹ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [CEPAL]), *Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2020*, February 2021.

⁴⁰ Wilson Center, “Food Security in Latin America During the COVID-19 Crisis,” video, October 21, 2020.

⁴¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2020*, June 16, 2020.

⁴² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “COVID-19: People with Certain Medical Conditions,” webpage, updated October 14, 2021.

⁴³ World Bank, “Universal Healthcare on the Rise in Latin America,” February 14, 2013.

⁴⁴ McKinsey, *Perspectives on Healthcare in Latin America*, September 2011.

⁴⁵ CEPAL, “América Latina (17 países): gasto en salud del gobierno central, 2018 (En porcentajes del PIB) [Latin America (17 Countries): Central Government Spending on Healthcare, 2018 (Percentage of GDP)],” online database, undated.

⁴⁶ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “National Health Expenditure Data: Historical,” webpage, December 16, 2020.

⁴⁷ Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, “Healthcare Expenditure, UK Health Accounts: 2018,” April 28, 2020.

⁴⁸ World Bank, “Current Health Expenditure (% of GDP)—China,” online database, undated.

⁴⁹ Knoema, “South Africa—Current Health Expenditure as a Share of GDP,” online database, undated.

not just about the money spent—how it is spent has been equally important. A study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found that 22 of 27 LAC countries are in the bottom half of average efficiency rankings.⁵⁰ In addition, an OECD report indicated that misallocating health spending actually has slowed down, and perhaps halted, progress toward better health coverage in the region.⁵¹ Even though health systems are incredibly complex and no one could have predicted the pandemic, it is unsurprising that many systems in the region have been overwhelmed by the crisis. Hospitals throughout the region—and the world—have been challenged to keep up with the surge of patients.⁵² With the addition of new, more transmissible variants of the virus, even the most prepared hospitals, such as those in Brazil, have been overwhelmed.⁵³ Although other countries with comparatively better and more accessible health care systems, such as the United States, Italy, and Belgium, have equally faced significant challenges, the relatively weaker and less accessible health care systems in LAC have played an important factor in inhibiting the public health capability to respond to the pandemic.

Poverty and inequality, which strongly intersect with health outcomes, have understandably also played a role in making the region more susceptible to the virus. The most important factor is that it is extremely challenging for many people in LAC to comply with public health protocols such as social distancing and quarantining. A significant percentage of the population in the region is engaged in informal employment, which makes working from home challenging or impossible.⁵⁴ A street vendor or common laborer cannot work from home, for example. A May 2021 briefing by the European Parliament reported that over half of all jobs in Latin America were in the informal economy,⁵⁵ although many countries in the region have significantly higher rates, such as Bolivia (85 percent), Honduras (83 percent), Guatemala (79 percent), and El Salvador, Paraguay, and Peru (all close to 70 percent).⁵⁶ People must choose between following government protocols and putting food on the table.

Additionally, high levels of urbanization and the nature of urban areas have contributed to spread of the virus. Almost 80 percent of the region’s population lives in cities, with 21 percent

⁵⁰ Diana Pinto, Rodrigo Moreno-Serra, Gianluca Cafagna, and Laura Giles Álvarez, “Efficient Spending for Healthier Lives,” in Alejandro Izquierdo, Carola Pessino, and Guillermo Vuletin, eds., *Better Spending for Better Lives: How Latin America and the Caribbean Can Do More with Less*, Inter-American Development Bank, 2018.

⁵¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020.

⁵² Juan Montes and Samantha Pearson, “New Covid-19 Surge Sweeps Across Latin America,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2020.

⁵³ Terrence McCoy and Heloísa Traiano, “The Amazonian City That Hatched the Brazil Variant Has Been Crushed by It,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 2021.

⁵⁴ Takuji Komatsuzaki, Samuel Pienknagura, Carlo Pizzinelli, Jorge Roldós, and Frederik Toscani, “Latin American Labor Markets During COVID-19,” in International Monetary Fund, ed., *Regional Economic Outlook for Western Hemisphere: Pandemic Persistence Clouds the Recovery*, October 2020.

⁵⁵ Enrique Gómez Ramírez and Cecilia Handeland, “The Informal Economy and Coronavirus in Latin America,” Members’ Research Service, European Parliament, May 2021.

⁵⁶ Teresa Romero, “Informal Employment as Percentage of Total Employment in Selected Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean as of 2020,” Statista, July 5, 2021.

of the urban population living in slums, informal settlements, or inadequate housing.⁵⁷ In many cases, multiple families and/or generations live together, making it even less possible to socially distance or quarantine. As expected, the recorded numbers of cases and deaths in some of these underserved communities are shocking. For instance, as of December 2020, more people had died in the slums (favelas) of Rio de Janeiro than in 121 countries.⁵⁸ Other areas throughout the region with high densities of informal housing have equally felt the pain.⁵⁹

Most controversially, systemic corruption and greed throughout many areas of the region have directly reduced countries' abilities to respond to the pandemic. Attempts to measure public corruption in the region, such as the Americas Society/Council of the Americas' Capacity to Combat Corruption Index⁶⁰ and the Baker Institute's *The State of Corruption in Latin America Report*⁶¹ show that corruption has been pervasive in many countries for years, something that most of the region's citizens already knew.⁶² In the context of the pandemic, many people recognize that corruption has only made efforts to distribute medical equipment and vaccines, coordinate with local, national, and international organizations, and gather data more difficult.⁶³ It should come as no surprise that police and investigators in Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, and Mexico have opened cases into alleged cases of public corruption related to graft of funds meant to combat the pandemic.⁶⁴ Because of the inherent secretive nature of corruption, it is likely that corruption in the context of the pandemic is more pervasive than we currently know. Going forward, the region will probably only discover years later the degree to which corruption has diminished the response to the pandemic.

China's projected 8.1 percent GDP growth for 2022 may leave it postured to weather the pandemic storm, and Beijing's market and financial relationships in LAC nations leave it well positioned to take advantage of the situation. Chinese companies could be welcomed by financially distressed companies in LAC looking for direct investments, new projects, and ever-increasing Chinese economic involvement, further exacerbating the leverage Beijing has over

⁵⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020.

⁵⁸ "Covid-19 in Favelas Press Event: More People Have Died in Rio's Favelas Than in 121 Nations," *RioOnWatch*, December 8, 2020.

⁵⁹ Fabio Teixeira, Anastasia Moloney, and Oscar Lopez, "'No Time': Latin America's Slum Dwellers Lead Coronavirus Battle," May 25, 2020.

⁶⁰ Roberto Simon and Geert Aalbers, *The 2020 Capacity to Combat Corruption (CCC) Index: Assessing Latin America's Ability to Detect, Punish and Prevent Corruption amid Covid-19*, Americas Society/Council of the Americas, Americas Quarterly, and Control Risks, 2020.

⁶¹ Paul Lagues, Xiaoxuan Yang, and Andrés Castro, "The State of Corruption in Latin America," Rice University, Baker Institute for Public Policy, July 8, 2019.

⁶² Transparency International, "CPI 2019: Americas," January 23, 2020.

⁶³ Daniel R. Alonso and Benjamin N. Gedan, "How to Tackle Coronavirus Corruption," *Foreign Policy*, August 10, 2020.

⁶⁴ Natalie Kitroeff and Mitra Taj, "Latin America's Virus Villains: Corrupt Officials Collude with Price Gougers for Body Bags and Flimsy Masks," *New York Times*, June 20, 2020.

LAC governments.⁶⁵ As one U.S. official noted, even Iran may offer financial support to regional leaders to help feed people in need under COVID-19 economic stress, particularly those in Central America and the Caribbean whose loan amounts could exceed their GDPs.⁶⁶

Additionally, both China and Russia have used medical supplies and the promise of vaccines to pursue foreign policy objectives.⁶⁷ Regional governments report numerous complications when negotiating with the U.S. private sector for access to vaccines, and even those that have obtained signed contracts have had problems with deliveries, creating difficulties for U.S. diplomacy throughout the region.⁶⁸ While the United States provided LAC countries some ventilators, shipped large amounts of hydroxychloroquine, and prohibited the export of personal protection equipment, China was initially very active in responding to country specific requests. Though people in the region believed U.S. vaccines to be more effective, China and Russia made vaccines more available and affordable to LAC governments.⁶⁹

The often-discussed “vaccine diplomacy” of U.S adversaries clearly demonstrated the quid pro quo nature of their actions.⁷⁰ Still, as Beijing provides poorer nations assistance through vaccine efforts, it can also link that assistance to the prospect of future investments.⁷¹ Most of the initially vaccinated people in Brazil, the region’s largest market, received the Chinese-developed CoronaVac shot.⁷² Russia also claimed that it had received orders for 1.2 billion doses of its Sputnik V vaccine, securing emergency-use approval in Argentina and Mexico.⁷³ Moscow seeks to compete with the United States and China for vaccines and has proven willing to invest large amounts of money to do so,⁷⁴ especially in an effort to boost Russia’s global standing in the wake of opposition activist Alexei Navalny’s jail sentence in February 2021.⁷⁵ Russia proved quick to fill the vacuum left by the United States⁷⁶ and received positive press coverage for helping make vaccines available in parts of the region.⁷⁷

⁶⁵ R. Evan Ellis, “Viewpoint: Why China’s Advance in Latin America Matters,” *National Defense*, January 27, 2021.

⁶⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁶⁷ Anne-Sylvaine Chassany, “The West Should Pay Attention to Russia and China’s Vaccine Diplomacy,” *Financial Times*, February 10, 2021.

⁶⁸ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

⁶⁹ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

⁷⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁷¹ Chassany, 2021.

⁷² Michael Pooler, Carolina Pulice, and Henry Foy, “Russia Criticises Brazil’s Rejection of Sputnik V Vaccine,” *Financial Times*, April 27, 2021.

⁷³ Chassany, 2021.

⁷⁴ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

⁷⁵ Chassany, 2021.

⁷⁶ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

⁷⁷ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

Framing the Mission: Strategic Guidance and Interpretation

In the following sections, we provide an overview of U.S. strategic documentation relevant to the Western Hemisphere, including LAC and SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility (AOR), from national- and departmental-level guidance to operational interpretations issued by GCCs and bureaus.

Overview of National Guidance and How It Affects Agencies

Beginning with the 2017 NSS, and then amplified in the 2018 NDS, the United States began to prioritize GPC with China and Russia over the counter-VEO activities that had taken precedence over all others following September 11, 2001. In rapid succession, both SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM developed Theater Campaign Plans echoing the change in priorities. Below, we discuss salient comments made during interviews regarding the subtleties of translating strategic guidance documents into more operationally relevant strategic guidance documents. We then present a review of unclassified strategy documents to evaluate the degree to which the Department of State's and USAID's *Joint Regional Strategy* and NORTHCOM's and SOUTHCOM's Theater Campaign Plans display symmetry with each other and mirror the guidance of the NDS.

Departmental Guidance to SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM and How It Translates into Combatant Command Strategies

The 2018 NDS shifted national security strategy from the 2008 NDS's focus on counter-VEO operations to a prioritization of global power competition (GPC). In response, GCCs redrafted their respective Theater Campaign Plans. The shift in strategic prioritization is widely apparent to personnel affiliated with SOUTHCOM. According to one civilian official, there has been a "paradigm shift" since 2018, with countering China, Russia, Iran, overtaking countering narcotics and TCOs as the top priority.⁷⁸ This pivot is also appreciable within NORTHCOM, discussed later. Nevertheless, the force has been challenged to operationalize the concept of strategic competition and its end states. A senior SOUTHCOM official discussed the challenges of striking the right balance and achieving global strategic coherence in articulating a policy for GPC. With limited personnel at SOUTHCOM, dedicating staff to engage in CCMD coordination of GPC implementation proved taxing.⁷⁹ This requirement for personnel to coordinate with the Pentagon was amplified by separate meetings for coordination between Joint Chiefs of Staff directorates and the CCMD directorate level. The pressure to engage in all coordination efforts and exercises left some in SOUTHCOM feeling underresourced and micromanaged. As the senior official concluded, "It isn't more micromanagement [that is needed], but more

⁷⁸ Interview with U.S. civilian official, April 12, 2021.

⁷⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

coherence,” when it comes to providing guidance on how best all facets of DoD can contribute effectively to GPC.⁸⁰ A strategic document that addresses GPC goals and priorities in depth across all domains is not yet readily available for forces; as a result, many personnel hours are spent trying to develop and refine strategic documents at each headquarters.

Another senior official said that while some effort has been made to increase coordination among GCCs, when it comes to GPC, thus far the process has been more superficial than clarifying. “I don’t think we’re there yet,” the official stated with regard to global GPC coordination efforts, “The briefs look nice, but the actions don’t follow what the briefs say.”⁸¹ A security priority such as competition can be difficult and nebulous to operationalize if the end state is not clarified with nuance.

At the same time, some officials expressed concern over coherence of strategic goals. A senior U.S. official remarked that the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) could do more to focus on the changing strategic landscape. “Staying up at the policy level and getting the strategy right is incredibly complex and tough,” stated the official, after arguing that Pentagon stakeholders display a tendency for micromanagement at operational levels. The job of OSD and others, the official continued, is “setting the policy and parameters and the tools, getting access to right pots of money, the right authorities, the right things to help maneuver in the quickest fashion.” In contrast, “operating on the ground and figuring out, the Chinese are trying to go here, here, and here, what is our chess move? [We should be] thinking three moves ahead to block their move.

. . . That should be led by the CCMD because they are in daily contact with the countries and have an on the ground operation.”⁸² As will be discussed, this sentiment is indicative of a feeling at the GCC level that recently established protocols for determining GCC resource levels more collectively is distracting higher echelons in the Pentagon from sufficiently addressing gaps in strategic guidance and priorities.

SOUTHCOM priorities are organized into three main lines of effort: strengthening partnerships, countering threats, and building the team. A cornerstone of this strategy is maintaining persistent engagement with partner nations and improving their ability to counter mutual threats and respond to crises in an effective manner. Under strengthening partnerships, according to a senior U.S. official, the priorities are to tell their stories, gain influence, and provide support and resources as available. These characteristics reflect the reality of increased competition from adversaries in the region. According to the senior official, “[We] used to want to go out, do projects, and put the partner out in front. That has changed. To counter external threats in this theater, we need them to know that the U.S. is there and want [them to know that]

⁸⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

⁸¹ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

⁸² Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

the U.S. is the partner of choice.”⁸³ The command makes the most of every opportunity to engage with partner nations under the guise of “If they are with us, they aren’t with the Chinese. China is the big thing and it isn’t a secret. [We] have competition with China in the Caribbean and Southern partners.” In addition to that, the command leverages additional partner building opportunities through OSD engagements, working with State, and other agencies in theater.⁸⁴

The *Interim National Security Strategy Guidance* (INSSG), released in March 2021, has continuity with the 2018 NDS and maintains the emphasis on long-term strategic competition with China as a focused effort. Strategic competition efforts within the Western Hemisphere are focused on maintaining access and influence through partnerships and regional alliances: “The vital national interests of the United States are inextricably bound to the fortunes of our closest neighbors in the Americas, we will expand our engagement and partnerships throughout the Western Hemisphere . . . based on . . . a commitment to economic prosperity, security, human rights, and dignity.”⁸⁵ The 2018 NDS has direct implications to SOUTHCOM theater activities: develop partnerships and regional alliances, and combat TCOs. “Supporting the Interagency lead, DoD will deepen its relations with regional [Western Hemisphere] countries that contribute military capabilities to shared regional and global security challenges.”⁸⁶ These priorities are reflected and expanded in the *U.S. Southern Command Strategy*, with particular attention and depth given to strengthening partnerships. The document mirrors the NDS strategic priorities, and expounds multiple methods to achieve these ends, from security cooperation to interoperability through multinational exercises, and finally building professional institutions. Lastly, the document declares a strong commitment to reinforcing partner efforts to deny TCOs access and resources.⁸⁷

Released the same month as the new INSSG, the 2021 NORAD-NORTHCOM (NNC) Strategy Executive Summary commits to advance and strengthen relationships with Mexico and the Bahamas. Clearly developed together, with the respective drafters in close coordination, the NNC Strategy Executive Summary quotes the INSSG’s strategic guidance even though the two documents were published within weeks of each other. The NNC Strategy Executive Summary describes NORTHCOM’s missions as (1) defending the homeland, (2) conducting security cooperation activities with allies and partners, and (3) supporting civil authorities. It also specifically lists engagement with Mexico and the Bahamas as a priority in the current strategic context, “In this era of great power competition, robust relationships with our international and interagency partners, the Services, other CCMDs, industry, the private sector, and academia are

⁸³ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁸⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁸⁵ Joseph R. Biden, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2021, p. 10.

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, 2018.

⁸⁷ U.S. Southern Command, “United States Southern Command Strategy: Enduring Promise for the Americas,” May 8, 2019.

key to expanding the competitive space and enabling a layered defense of North America across the competition continuum.”⁸⁸ The U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Military Cooperation Roundtable and the U.S.-Bahamas Bilateral Security Cooperation Framework are mentioned by name in support of this effort to strengthen cooperative defense.

The 2021 NNC Strategy Executive Summary goes on to stress the importance of security cooperation as a means of confronting diverse mutual threats. “Security cooperation with Mexico and The Bahamas, while focused on traditional military roles and missions, also enhances their ability to disrupt, degrade, and defeat TCOs. TCOs create opportunities for exploitation by our competitors who employ unrestricted warfare.”⁸⁹

A civilian official stated that in NORTHCOM the three primary missions were traditionally managed separately, with NORAD focused on homeland defense and NORTHCOM concentrating on support to civilian authorities, with a small portion of the staff covering security cooperation activities as a stovepiped activity.⁹⁰ This has evolved, however, such that these missions are now more integrated and mutually enforcing and both GPC and counter-TCO activities are incorporated in a layered defense of the homeland. As referenced previously, the 2017 NSS made multiple mentions of TCOs and included a section entitled “Dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations,” whereas the unclassified summary of the 2018 NDS mentions TCOs twice: as actors on the global stage that threaten the security environment, and in an avowal to work by, with, and through local partners to counter transnational criminal activity.⁹¹ The slight change in emphasis removed the strategic obligation of the United States to conduct counter TCO activity directly. The INSSG calls directly for addressing criminal violence in Central America and funding the effort, and thus closes the discrepancy.

As discussed, the shift in national-level strategic prioritization toward strategic competition is widely apparent to personnel affiliated with SOUTHCOM. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the threats posed by TCOs, both to the United States directly and to its regional interests, remain a key focus of the command and presents a complex problem set that goes beyond narcotics. Moreover, the presence of TCOs is connected to GPC, because TCOs provide a conduit through which adversaries can target U.S. interests.

In a strategic competition effort, assisting partner nations to overcome the eroding effects of TCOs on their governments and democracies is a clear method to retain influence among partner nations. “TCOs are a national security imperative. They are not an existential threat [to the

⁸⁸ North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, *NORAD and USNORTHCOM Strategy: Executive Summary*, March 2021, p. 11.

⁸⁹ North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, 2021, p. 12.

⁹⁰ Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

⁹¹ See the White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 11, and U.S. Department of Defense, 2018.

United States], but they are an existential threat to partner nations. If strong partners and allies is central to our strategy, we must meet them where they are.”⁹²

Strategic competition initiatives within the Western Hemisphere are focused on maintaining access and influence through partnerships and regional alliances, but some feel that the issue is not receiving enough attention. According to a senior official, the Pentagon should widen its aperture when it comes to conceptualizing its competition with China. Regarding the outcompete-China agenda, this official argued, “We have had to work hard for the Pentagon to see that [strategic competition] is a global issue and not just an Asia Pacific issue because China is really aggressive in *this hemisphere* and making a lot of inroads, which impacts our ability to do power projection, advance economics, rule of law, etc.”⁹³ By the official’s estimation, there is an outcompete strategic agenda at DoD that is generally clear, but there is not an outcompete-China mentality behind its implementation. The senior official explained that the military has not had to compete in a region like Latin America for a long time and as a result are not set up to compete for a host of reasons.⁹⁴

Departmental Guidance to State and USAID and How It Translates into Bureau-Level Strategy

The Department of State and USAID’s *Joint Regional Strategy* for the Western Hemisphere addresses soft power threats head-on. “We catalyze regional efforts to bolster the rule of law and confront transnational crime through strong diplomatic engagement, supporting local efforts to professionalize justice, police and security forces.”⁹⁵ The document prioritizes engagement efforts to confront and halt transnational crime in partnership with regional allies. This emphasis does not neglect the malign actions of Russia and China in the meantime: Objective 1.3 of the document seeks to counter the effects of Russian arms sales and military training exercises in the region; Objective 2.3 seeks to counter the effects of Chinese predatory economic practices and foreign development model. Officials in both SOUTHCOM and the Department of State’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs assess the strategic security threats similarly and have outlined methods to address them. Within strategic documents, there is evidence to deconflict these efforts to ensure synergy and avoid duplication of efforts. As discussed further below, SOUTHCOM acknowledges State as the interagency lead for the soft power effort and nests their security strategy within this framework.

The Departments of State and Defense equally emphasize security in their strategic documents. Ensuring that these agencies do not duplicate or obviate each other’s efforts is a

⁹² Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

⁹³ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

⁹⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019.

matter of coordination. Referring to TCOs and the threat they pose to U.S. strategic interests, a civilian official suggested that Congress could play a role in helping to ensure that contesting them is a priority. In particular, Congress can ensure that the relevant interagency stakeholders coordinate on the issues and, if necessary, can weigh in on what the appropriate role is for each stakeholder agency.⁹⁶ Considering the normal agenda of Congress, however, ensuring that appropriate liaison positions are staffed and utilized is likely sufficient.

Conclusion

All documents that we reviewed emphasized strategic military partnerships to disrupt TCO activities and/or engagement with allies to ensure U.S. access and influence toward strategic interests in LAC and SOUTHCOM. Strategic documents reviewed spanned from 2008 to 2021, at the classified and unclassified level, each illustrating a clear mirroring of higher strategic documents to lower strategic documents, which in turn developed operational and mission requirements. Despite this, there remain continuity gaps when it comes to both the enduring challenges posed by TCOs and the evolving threat of adversaries competing against U.S. interests in the region.

Regarding TCOs, national strategic guidance is generally inconsistent in how it conceptualizes the threat. The 2017 NSS elevated the prioritization of TCOs and provided a more comprehensive articulation of the various means through which they can threaten security, political stability, and economic development. The 2018 NDS, on the other hand, made minimal mention of TCOs and, when it did, included them among a general list of nonstate threats. Finally, the 2021 INSSG makes scant reference to violent and criminal nonstate actors, without providing more detail. In contrast, strategic guidance put out by DoD and State/USAID at the GCC and bureau level provide clearer articulation of the various ways TCOs can both harm U.S. interests and provide adversaries with an additional conduit for competition. Bridging the gap between how national-level guidance perceives the threat from TCOs will likely have a direct effect on future resourcing decisions.

In terms of GPC, national- and department-level guidance has clearly articulated that China, Russia, and Iran pose a threat to U.S. interests and are each pursuing competitive measures short of conflict in their pursuit of conflicting interests. There is also clear messaging that U.S. agencies and entities should adopt similar measures to counter these efforts. What is still evolving, however, is how this translates at the operational level. This is particularly the case regarding regions outside the immediate geographic vicinity of China, Russia, and Iran. As will be seen, an initial move to reinforce U.S. resources in the immediate “neighborhoods” of these adversaries has come at the cost of other regions and is incongruous to how they perceive what is increasingly becoming a global competition, especially in LAC.

⁹⁶ Interview with civilian official, June 7, 2021.

The following chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of how China, Russia, and Iran perceive LAC in the context of competition and demonstrate ways that each has become more assertive in the region in recent years.

Chapter 3. Gauging the Threat: U.S. Adversaries in the Western Hemisphere

The previous chapter highlighted what is at stake for the United States and its adversaries in the Western Hemisphere. In this chapter, we examine how those adversaries have been, and currently are, competing with the United States in the region. Of course, not all objectives and activities by these countries pose direct threats to U.S. security, so a focus on those that do or could in the near future are prioritized. China, Russia, and, to a lesser extent, Iran are actively competing with the United States in America's backyard, calling core strategic interests in the region into question.⁹⁷ This chapter is organized with sections dedicated to each of these three countries, each covering a short background of the country in LAC, their current and future goals in the region, and select investments, programs, and partnerships relevant to U.S. interests.

China in the Western Hemisphere

“Getting the Pentagon to understand that the fight against China is global rather than regional has been very tough. It has been easier to get State to understand that than DoD.”

—*Senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021*

China's presence in the Western Hemisphere represents the greatest threat to U.S. interests in the region. According to a senior U.S. official, the Pentagon should widen its aperture when it comes to conceptualizing its competition with China. Regarding the “Outcompete China” agenda, a phrase used by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken,⁹⁸ this official argued, “We have had to work hard for the Pentagon to see that is a global issue and not just an Asia Pacific issue because China is really aggressive in this hemisphere and making a lot of inroads, which impacts our ability to do power projection, advance economics, rule of law, etc.”⁹⁹ Beijing has dedicated significant resources to shift hemispheric relations in adverse ways, gain influence over communities and governments, and support political models that are hostile to U.S. interests throughout LAC.¹⁰⁰ However, perhaps because of its relatively recent growth in the region and/or the nature of its approach, many of the threats posed by Beijing are often not recognized

⁹⁷ Ryan C. Berg and Hal Brands, “The Return of Geopolitics: Latin America and the Caribbean in an Era of Strategic Competition,” Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy, June 2021.

⁹⁸ “US Can ‘Outcompete’ China, Secretary of State Nominee Blinken Says,” Voice of America News, January 19, 2021.

⁹⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Berg and Brands, 2021.

or under reported. The following sections aim to illuminate Chinese activities in America's backyard.

Background

Before the 1970s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) maintained relatively few relations with LAC, and Cuba was the only regional country not maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan. It wasn't until China began serious economic reforms and the United States established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979 that LAC-China relationships began growing.¹⁰¹ Particularly in the 1990s, as China's domestic growth "miracle" demanded significant resources, the PRC turned to resource-rich countries in the developing world (Middle East, Africa, and Latin America) to obtain oil and other raw materials. The PRC simultaneously facilitated Chinese companies' exports to these regions and construction projects in developing countries.¹⁰² Political engagement accompanied the PRC's economic activities, as China established a "strategic partnership" with Brazil in 1993, and then similar partnerships with Venezuela (2001), Mexico (2003), Argentina (2004), Peru (2008), and Chile (2012).¹⁰³

Chinese trade with Latin America surged from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$261 billion in 2013,¹⁰⁴ helping fuel China's rapid economic growth.¹⁰⁵ Today, China remains second to the United States in total LAC trade. However, if Mexico, America's largest trade partner, is excluded, China surpassed the United States for regional trade in 2018 and 2019 with over \$223 billion, compared with total U.S. regional trade of \$198 billion (again, excluding Mexico).¹⁰⁶ As a result, Chinese companies gradually became important partners and suppliers for LAC firms and operators of the region's oil fields, mines, ports, telecommunications industry, and electricity grids.¹⁰⁷ Oil from Venezuela, Ecuador, and Mexico fueled China's expanding fleet of cars, trucks, and container ships. Chile and Peru provided copper that China used to produce over half the world's consumer electronics products. Brazilian iron ore formed the steel in China's new cities. Soybeans from Argentina and Brazil fed the livestock that Chinese diets began demanding with increased standards of living. In response, Chinese institutions invested vast amounts of money in commodities throughout the region.¹⁰⁸ This "China Boom" that Latin America

¹⁰¹ Rhys Jenkins, *How China Is Reshaping the Global Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 223.

¹⁰² Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations*, fifth edition, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, p. 269.

¹⁰³ Jenkins, 2019, p. 223.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah McDowall, "Key Amigos—China's Strategic Partnerships in Latin America," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 29, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ During roughly the same period, U.S.-LAC trade more than doubled from \$171 billion in 2000 to nearly \$400 billion in 2012 (J. F. Hornbeck, "US-Latin America Trade and Investment in the 21st Century: What's Next for Deepening Integration?" *The Dialogue*, January 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Cassandra Garrison, "In Latin America, a Biden White House Faces a Rising China," Reuters, December 14, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Ellis, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin P. Gallagher, *The China Triangle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 7.

experienced also had benefits for much of the region, decreasing inequality in many countries and helping Latin American economies endure the global financial crisis of 2008–2009.¹⁰⁹

Chinese firms rapidly gained the physical, financial, and legal infrastructure to continue expanding their commercial activities. As economic relationships developed, political and military relationships between the PRC and regional governments also expanded as the physical presence of Chinese firms and personnel grew throughout LAC.¹¹⁰ The PRC's security engagements in LAC, which expanded the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) global reach to an area proximate to the continental United States, also became part of China's broader global strategy over the past 20 years.¹¹¹ China sent military police to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti for eight years, deployed its hospital ship multiple times, conducted port calls and military exercises with warships, and began security and military training programs.¹¹²

As Beijing expanded its involvement in economic and military affairs in the region, some people in China and LAC countries have benefited from these engagements. However, Chinese initiatives frequently included predatory practices and produced relationships disadvantageous to their LAC counterparts, often enabling corruption and authoritarian populism.¹¹³ Prior to Xi Jinping assuming the office of president in 2013, Chinese literature recognized the need to tread lightly in the region, with concerns that the United States would push back against these types of consequences. Those concerns waned after 2013, though, and more explicit engagements with traditional U.S. allies increased. In some cases, China became the only major actor for LAC countries to engage with, and officials in the region adopted an image of a disinterested America. In other countries, regional governments began to show a concern for how to balance the China-U.S. competition as dependencies on China grew and Beijing continued to aggressively pursue its national objectives.¹¹⁴

China's Goals and Objectives in the Western Hemisphere

Beijing's true strategic objectives in LAC, and whether they directly threaten U.S. interests, have been a topic of much debate. Some observers find it clear that Beijing's use of economic, financial, and security relationships are aimed at undermining U.S. political clout in the region and gaining international influence at America's expense. Others argue that the growth of Chinese-LAC relations has solely economic ends and that the PRC seeks to avoid challenging

¹⁰⁹ Gallagher, 2016, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ R. Evan Ellis, "China's Strategy in Latin America and the Caribbean," in Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham eds., *China Steps Out*, New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 194.

¹¹¹ R. Evan Ellis, *Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2020b.

¹¹² Ellis, 2021.

¹¹³ Ellis, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Interview with U.S. SME of Chinese affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean, May 4, 2021.

the United States in the region.¹¹⁵ Most agree that the PRC maintains grand ambitions in the economic realm, including accessing commodities and agricultural goods, opening markets to Chinese goods and services, and obtaining information regarding technologies.¹¹⁶ Others maintain that these goals are tied to, or may even at times be in service of, other objectives, such as developing diplomatic support and China’s image internationally¹¹⁷ and promoting a “multipolar world” not dominated by the United States that could oppose China’s rise.¹¹⁸

At the very least, most observers agree that China’s activities in LAC are a subset of its larger global ambitions and domestic needs. Even if principally about economics, Beijing has adopted political and military campaigns that are, at a minimum, supporting efforts with its own instrumental objectives.¹¹⁹ Further, even purely economic engagements have extensive political and security-related implications. For example, as LAC governments’ dependencies on Chinese companies grow, support for Chinese interests in international bodies such as the UN has also increased, especially from Caribbean countries. The introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, and its extension to LAC in 2018, supports China’s domestic economic growth as Beijing seeks to avoid the “middle-income trap.” However, it also promotes Chinese companies and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in a variety of industries and improves China’s soft power.¹²⁰ As Beijing’s political relationships and the revisions to institutional order that facilitate them expand, China’s global reach, including militarily, has also grown.¹²¹

In the remainder of this section, we summarize five categories of Beijing’s most likely current and future strategic objectives in LAC that consistently appear in the relevant literature and in discussions with experts. The first two are economic in nature: Chinese imports from and exports to the region. The third—promoting a “multipolar world”—is geopolitical. Beijing’s Taiwan policy is particularly significant and is described separately as a fourth goal. A final set of regional objectives deal with different security and defense related outcomes the PRC seeks.

Importing Natural Resources and Agricultural Products

One of the PRC’s highest-priority objectives in Latin America over the past two decades has been the importing of natural resources and agricultural products to support China’s continued economic development. Around 85 percent of Chinese imports from Latin America consist of oil, minerals, and agricultural products.¹²² For oil and other sources of energy, China is

¹¹⁵ Jenkins, 2019, p. 284.

¹¹⁶ Ellis, 2018, p. 196.

¹¹⁷ Lina Benabdallah, *Shaping the Future of Power*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Ellis, 2018, p. 197.

¹¹⁹ Interview with U.S. SME, April 29, 2021.

¹²⁰ Interview with U.S. SME, May 4, 2021.

¹²¹ Ellis, 2021.

¹²² Jenkins, 2019, p. 237.

incentivized to diversify where it obtains such resources,¹²³ particularly if it can diversify them away from a reliance on Middle Eastern countries.¹²⁴ The importance of this objective is indicated by China's focus on those Latin American countries with the greatest oil-producing capacity, including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Mexico, and, in more recent years, Bolivia and Uruguay.¹²⁵

While oil may be the most strategically important commodity that China obtains from LAC, access to other minerals needed to support commercial industries, such as steel and electronics, are also a high priority for the PRC.¹²⁶ Chinese companies competing in the global economic system require significant natural resources not in abundance in China but available in LAC.¹²⁷

Food security is also a component of China's import objective.¹²⁸ Brazil, Argentina, China, and the United States are the largest soy producers in the world. Soy seeds and oils are used frequently in China for tofu and other staple foods, cooking and flavoring, and increasingly as feed for China's growing cattle industry. Chinese demand for soy ballooned with its economic growth, making soy Latin America's second-largest export commodity to China during the "China Boom."¹²⁹ Overall, many South American economies are still heavily skewed toward extractive and agricultural industries.¹³⁰

Accessing Markets for Chinese Exports

The PRC would like to open additional foreign markets for Chinese exports. In addition to reducing a reliance on North American and European markets (which were affected by the financial crisis and may be subject to political uncertainties),¹³¹ LAC presents an opportunity for Chinese companies to compete with U.S. companies. Some observers suggest the PRC has an ultimate goal of becoming "the world's predominant economic hegemon" and that the Western Hemisphere presents it with new markets for government assisted companies in industries such as telecommunications, technology, and arms.¹³² This objective is not unique to LAC, of course.

¹²³ "A Golden Opportunity," *The Economist*, November 17, 2016.

¹²⁴ McDowall, 2014.

¹²⁵ Jon Grevatt, "China Enhances Defence Industrial Relations in South America," *Jane's Defence Industry*, March 11, 2011.

¹²⁶ Jenkins, 2019, pp. 237–238.

¹²⁷ Gavin Greenwood, "Benefit Trap—China's Search for Resource Security," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 16, 2011.

¹²⁸ Jenkins, 2019, pp. 237–238.

¹²⁹ Gallagher, 2016, p. 46.

¹³⁰ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

¹³¹ Jenkins, 2019, p. 239.

¹³² Robert Morgus, Brian Fonseca, Kieran Green, and Alexander Crowther, "Are China and Russia on the Cyber Offensive in Latin America and the Caribbean?" *New America*, July 26, 2019.

Chinese relations across the “Global South” are designed to develop trade interdependence and facilitate Chinese goods, investments, and contractors flowing into newly opened markets.¹³³

Promoting a “Multipolar World” with Less Dependence on Western Governments, Companies, and Institutions

The PRC’s 2016 policy white paper toward Latin America specifically identifies a “multipolar world” as an objective to promote, the first time the PRC announced this position publicly.¹³⁴ Thus, while debate over whether China is a status quo power or a revisionist power continues, there is strong reason to view China’s economic objectives as a component of a larger, geopolitical goal of challenging the U.S. hegemonic position internationally.¹³⁵ Cementing a “multipolar world” requires the PRC to promote a positive image of China’s incredibly quick, and admittedly impressive, economic growth. Further, the PRC seeks to convince the Global South that cooperation with China (enmeshed with principles of respecting national sovereignty, noninterference in domestic affairs, and nonconditionality) is preferable to working with Western governments.¹³⁶ While not universal, it is clear that where China succeeds in one domain with an LAC government, say trade with members of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (translated as the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas, or ALBA), it may also find regimes more willing to resist U.S.-backed institutions and policies in the region.¹³⁷

Chinese officials believe that the U.S.-led West is in terminal decline while China is on a path to “great rejuvenation.”¹³⁸ Historically, China has not been viewed as seeking to impose Confucian democracy or other political values on other governments as long as they are “passing tribute” and the flow of wealth is in Beijing’s direction. In this sense, Beijing may not be seeking political domination but rather a form of political subordination that ultimately benefits China.¹³⁹

One specific area where Beijing seeks to benefit from less U.S. global influence is in support from countries in international bodies, especially the UN. With 33 individual nation-states, LAC represents a significant number of votes that could support or counter Chinese foreign policy objectives.¹⁴⁰ Analysis of LAC votes in the UN General Assembly shows that LAC countries already cast votes in favor of China far more frequently than with the United States. LAC countries that maintain diplomatic relations with the PRC as opposed to Taiwan and countries that are smaller in population size are particularly likely to vote with China. However, the data

¹³³ Benabdallah, 2020, p. 20.

¹³⁴ Ellis, 2018, p. 197.

¹³⁵ Jenkins, 2019, p. 235.

¹³⁶ Benabdallah, 2020, p. 20.

¹³⁷ Ellis, 2018, p. 197.

¹³⁸ “China’s High Stakes Engagement with Iran,” *Financial Times*, April 13, 2021.

¹³⁹ Interview with U.S. SME on Latin American studies, April 29, 2021. For background on ALBA, see Joel D. Hirst, “A Guide to ALBA,” *Americas Quarterly*, undated.

¹⁴⁰ Sutter, 2021, p. 293.

do not show a strong overall correlation with Chinese economic presence in an LAC country and that country's voting record in favor of China.¹⁴¹

Support for Beijing's Taiwan Policy

One of Beijing's greatest geopolitical objectives and interests driving its foreign policy generally is international recognition of the PRC as the "official China," in which a single China consists both of mainland China and the island of Taiwan. In 1971, the PRC replaced Taiwan (the Republic of China) as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and "began an international diplomatic campaign to delegitimize Taiwan as the official China."¹⁴² A survey of LAC national support for the PRC's version of its one-China position over the past two decades demonstrates how much effort Beijing has placed on this objective and why the Western Hemisphere is considered so important. In 2005, half (13 of 26) of all countries in the world that maintained full diplomatic relations with Taiwan were in LAC, with many being smaller nations in Central America and the Caribbean.¹⁴³

In 2008, Taiwan and the PRC agreed to suspend efforts to change foreign positions on the issue as the two governments sought rapprochement and greater integration. However, following the 2016 Taiwanese election victory of the Democratic People's Party (DPP) and presidency of Tsai Ing-wen, that agreement began to break down. Beijing again began chipping away support for Taiwan regionally and globally, and by 2018 LAC was home to 12 of the 23 nations recognizing Taiwan as the legitimate government of China.¹⁴⁴ By 2019, nine of the 11 states recognizing Taiwan were in LAC (Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). It is expected that Beijing will continue efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan in LAC—which still has the greatest concentration of states loyal to Taiwan, largely because of Taiwanese financial gifts and investments by Taiwanese companies.¹⁴⁵ Beijing is willing to apply pressure through multiple tools of power to decrease the number of Taiwan supporting countries to zero.¹⁴⁶

Security and Defense Objectives

Although China does not maintain military bases and formal security alliances in LAC, this absence should not be considered an indicator of Beijing's defense-related interests or potential influence in the region.¹⁴⁷ According to our review of Chinese defense-related activities,

¹⁴¹ Jenkins, 2019, pp. 299 and 318.

¹⁴² Benabdallah, 2020, p. 19.

¹⁴³ "China Courts Latin America," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 18, 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Ellis, 2018, p. 197; Sutter, 2021, p. 298.

¹⁴⁵ Morgus et al., 2019; Sutter, 2021, p. 293.

¹⁴⁶ Faller, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Ellis, 2021.

discussed in more detail below, Beijing’s military- and security-related objectives in LAC can be grouped into the following three categories:

1. increased access to arms markets
2. protection of foreign economic infrastructure
3. leverage for potential future conflicts.

Beijing has a wider strategy to increase defense exports into developing markets in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and South America. Of those regions, LAC remains one that China has not penetrated significantly yet and thus remains a noteworthy opportunity to advance the PRC’s larger goal.¹⁴⁸ Some South American countries seek to revive and develop their military capabilities (Argentina for example), presenting opportunities for China to expand its military influence and market share in the region. The importance of this objective is reinforced by China’s willingness to accept payments in the form of commodities to finance loans that fund military sales.¹⁴⁹ Relatedly, Beijing seeks to build all-around security relationships to increase the strength of the PLA through military-to-military exchanges, expand capabilities as it learns from others, and keep its military industrial base active in as many places around the world as possible.¹⁵⁰

In 2013, China launched the BRI, which “reflects the contemporary mercantilist vision of building and restructuring global infrastructure—including transportation, electricity, telecommunications, and finance—to facilitate favorable flows of commerce and transfers of wealth from the global periphery to the Chinese center.” In 2018, the initiative was officially extended to Latin America which has created an imperative for the PLA and the Chinese state to engage with LAC countries in an effort to protect the “expanding China-oriented infrastructure” along with Chinese commercial operations and personnel now in the region.¹⁵¹ Given the centrality of the resources, markets, and infrastructure vital to the PRC’s top strategic objectives, their security is equally important to Beijing.

While there remain varied opinions of China’s long-term military intentions,¹⁵² Beijing’s last security-related objective in the hemisphere is to gain leverage in the case of a potential conflict with the United States. This leverage may come in the form of persuading the governments of the region to avoid joining coalitions opposing the PRC. It may also include convincing LAC nations to deny the U.S. use of bases, airfields, ports, airspace, or territorial waters that support U.S. war plans or even to permit Chinese military use of those areas and facilities instead. The large number of Chinese companies and personnel operating in LAC could also support covert

¹⁴⁸ Jon Grevatt, “China Pledges to Step Up Defence Industrial Co-Operation with Brazil,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, September 10, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Richard D. Fisher, Jr., “China, Argentina Set for Defence Collaboration, Malvinas-Class OPV Deal,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, February 2, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with U.S. SME on Latin American studies, April 29, 2021.

¹⁵¹ Ellis, 2020b.

¹⁵² Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

forces in America's backyard by conducting intelligence, sabotage, and other irregular operations.¹⁵³ Chinese covert operations in LAC could disrupt U.S. deployment and sustainment flows or “create diversionary crises in the region in order to undermine the U.S. political will and resources to continue the fight against China, or at least oblige the United States to divert assets from the fight in Asia to protect the U.S. homeland and key allies.”¹⁵⁴

Finally, although China does not seem to be intent on growing a significant military foothold in the Caribbean, Beijing recognizes the strategic importance of the Caribbean and may seek to deepen relations with Caribbean nations to undermine their relations with the United States.¹⁵⁵ From a mirror-imaging view, this could allow Beijing to use the region as a diplomatic bargaining chip, potentially offering to reduce China's presence in the Caribbean in exchange for a U.S. withdrawal from the South China Sea, for example.¹⁵⁶

China's Approach: Investments, Programs, and Partnerships in the Western Hemisphere

In this section, we examine China's key economic interests in LAC and the methods it tends to adopt to pursue them. We also discuss how China, in some instances, couches its efforts as an alternative to engagement with the United States. This section focuses primarily on this GPC context of economic competition; additional information on Chinese economic programs in the Western Hemisphere can be found in Appendix B.

The PRC uses a classification system to label its foreign partners within a diplomatic hierarchy. These range from “new partner” to “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination.” It is not fully clear how these classifications affect Beijing's foreign policy in practice in all cases, but they can be useful for approximating the general importance the PRC places on relationships with different countries. For example, when a relationship title includes the term *comprehensive*, it is assumed to be a reference to multilayered economic, technological, cultural, and political government-to-government and people-to-people cooperation. *Strategic* may refer to bilateral relationships that rise above ideological and political systems, and *partnership* implies cooperation based on mutual respect, mutual trust, and equality. Seven countries in LAC are assigned the highest ranking: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.¹⁵⁷ Those and the rest of LAC nations' Chinese partnership classifications are depicted in Figure 3.1.

¹⁵³ Ellis, 2018, p. 211.

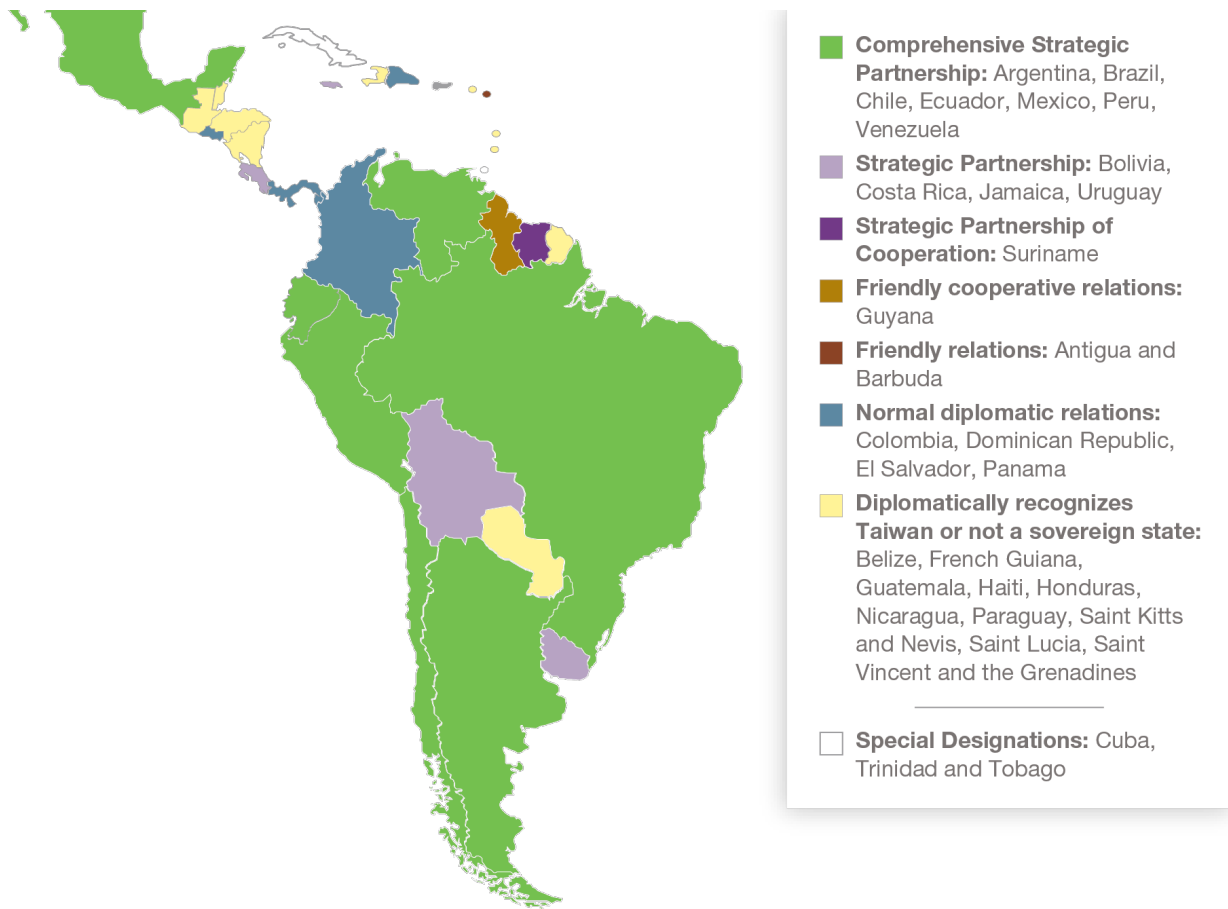
¹⁵⁴ Ellis, 2020b; interview with U.S. SME on Latin American studies, April 29, 2021.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with U.S. SME on Latin American studies, April 29, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Causwell, “US-China Competition Offers Opportunity for Caribbean States to Strengthen Security Capacity,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 15, 2020.

¹⁵⁷ Margaret Myers and Ricardo Barrios, “How China Ranks Its Partners in LAC,” *The Dialogue*, February 3, 2021.

Figure 3.1. China's Strategic Partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean



SOURCES: Adapted from Margaret Myers and Ricardo Barrios, “How China Ranks Its Partners in LAC,” *The Dialogue*, February 3, 2021; “China, Jamaica Lift Ties to Strategic Partnership,” CGTN, November 5, 2019; Latonya Linton, “Jamaica and China to Focus on Increasing Trade,” Jamaica Information Service, November 20, 2019.

Beijing applies several common methods and general principles in its efforts to deepen ties with LAC countries. Recent years have seen a sharp rise in such activities throughout the region, a rise that U.S. officials say is a clear signal that the PRC is establishing a solid foundation for a significant and long-term presence in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, China views LAC in terms of economic potential, as suggested by several of its strategic goals in the region, but China also employs numerous other tools of state power.¹⁵⁹ Some of the PRC’s approaches appear superficially benign, such as helping LAC governments meet their short-term economic interests—but doing so often positions the PRC to exploit the relationships it builds.¹⁶⁰ The following section examines some of China’s methods for achieving its strategic objectives in the region.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with U.S. SME on Latin America, May 7, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Ellis, 2021.

Presenting an Economic Alternative to the United States Through Trade, Loans, Investments, and the Belt and Road Initiative

Because some of China's most important strategic objectives in LAC are economic, it is not surprising that many of its most common approaches to engaging the region center on trade, loans, and investments. Chinese-LAC economic relations have grown significantly in the 21st century. China has significantly boosted its trade relations with countries throughout the region, consistently exporting an increasingly large amount of goods. In addition, China has aggressively marketed Chinese capital for investment, notably in infrastructure and natural resource–extraction projects. Although a sizable part of Chinese trade and investment is benign, there are numerous examples where Chinese firms' activities have had extreme negative consequences for the region. With the Chinese economy as the only major economy to have positive growth in 2020, it is reasonable to expect economic engagement with the region to continue.¹⁶¹ In this section, we briefly describe China's immense economic growth throughout LAC in recent years. Appendix B provides a more detailed analysis of Chinese economic activities, comparisons to U.S. economic activity, Beijing's key economic partners throughout the region, and examples of malign economic practices and negative outcomes.

China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, sparking a surge in Chinese trade with Latin America, which increased rapidly from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$261 billion in 2013.¹⁶² Total trade fell slightly in 2015 (to \$231.1 billion) and 2016 (to \$213.4 billion),¹⁶³ but is now closer to \$314 billion.¹⁶⁴ This represents a 26-fold growth in trade since 2000, the year before President Hu Jintao became the first Chinese head of state to visit the region and began transforming LAC-China relations.¹⁶⁵ In addition to trade, China has actively engaged economies in the region through investments, focusing on infrastructure and natural resource extraction. Most Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Latin America is within, or in support of, natural resource sectors, largely in oil and gas, which accounted for around 40 percent of all Chinese investments in the region between 2005 and 2015.¹⁶⁶ Chinese SOEs investing in LAC have advantages over many Western investors because they face less pressure for short-term profits, have the potential to invest for the long term, and are willing to remain in countries with complicated economic management practices.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Cheng, "China Is the Only Major Economy to Report Economic Growth for 2020," *Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2021.

¹⁶² McDowall, 2014.

¹⁶³ Ellis, 2018, p. 194.

¹⁶⁴ Ellis, 2021.

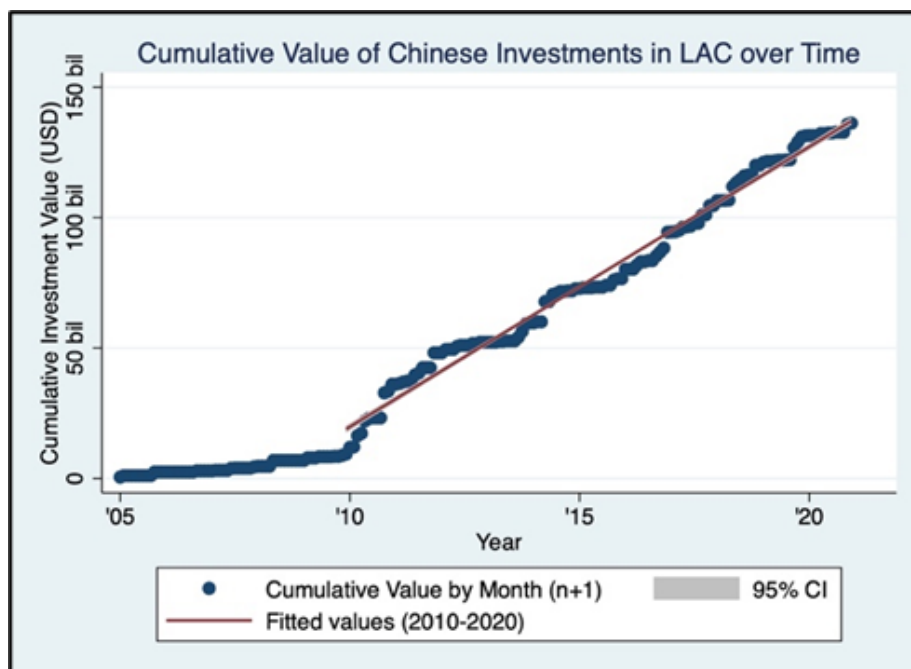
¹⁶⁵ Isabel Hilton, "China and Latin America: A Relationship Transformed,," *China Dialogue*, January 9, 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Jenkins, 2019, p. 229.

¹⁶⁷ Margaret Myers and Rebecca Ray, "China in Latin America: Major Impacts and Avenues for Constructive Engagement," *Carter Center*, August 29, 2019.

There is extremely strong statistical evidence (statistically significant at 0.1 percent) that the total annual value of Chinese investment in the region has been steady and relatively uniform from 2010 to 2020, represented in Figure 3.2.¹⁶⁸ Regression analysis suggests that the region saw, on average, approximately \$900 million per year for Chinese investment. Importantly, about 75 percent of recorded Chinese investments were valued under \$1 billion.

Figure 3.2. Cumulative Value of Chinese Investments in Latin America and the Caribbean



SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, “China Global Investment Tracker,” webpage, undated.

NOTE: CI = confidence interval.

Although China’s programs in LAC are not as aggressive as its programs in Africa, Beijing has also found it desirable or necessary to finance infrastructure construction projects in LAC. China has financed efforts to build roads, railroads, refineries, ports, and other facilities throughout the region.¹⁶⁹ The development of industrial capacity and infrastructure investment were prominent features of China’s own development strategy and thereby presents LAC governments with one piece of the PRC’s model of economic development, as well.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ It is unclear whether the stark difference in trends before and after 2010 is a result of data collection methods or differences in investment and construction contract policies, although there is little evidence to suggest that it is the latter.

¹⁶⁹ Sutter, 2021, pp. 291–292.

¹⁷⁰ Myers and Ray, 2019.

As with investments, the total annual value of Chinese construction contracts in the region was steady and relatively uniform from 2010 to 2020, as depicted in Figure 3.3.¹⁷¹ Regression analysis suggests that the region saw, on average, approximately \$475 million per year for Chinese construction contracts. Importantly, about 90 percent of recorded Chinese construction contracts were valued under \$1 billion.

Figure 3.3. Cumulative Value of Chinese Construction Contracts in Latin America and the Caribbean



SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, undated.

One area of Chinese investment and increasing influence in LAC of particular interest is telecommunications technologies. U.S. officials have warned LAC governments that adopting Chinese communications technologies would make information sharing and collaboration with the United States more difficult.¹⁷² Still, Chinese companies Huawei and, to a lesser extent, ZTE have built a substantial presence in LAC. They have constructed “3G and 4G networks for governments and private telecommunications companies, as well as selling telephones and data devices” and have successfully integrated “large local staffs with Chinese managers and technical personnel.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ It is unclear whether the stark difference in trends before and after 2010 is a result of data collection methods or differences in investment and construction contract policies, although there is little evidence to suggest that it is the latter.

¹⁷² Berg and Brands, 2021.

¹⁷³ Ellis, 2018, p. 203.

Many Chinese technologies promise the region real benefits that governments find difficult to turn down. However, the “Smart City” architectures of Huawei, which is alleged to have strong ties to the PLA, introduce surveillance systems, some of which are integrated with Chinese-financed infrastructure programs and have been reportedly used to surveil and undermine opposition politicians in areas where the technologies have been installed.¹⁷⁴ Smart City initiatives also provide “a backdoor for the Chinese government to monitor or intercept official information” that the United States seeks to share with LAC partners and gives Beijing “real-time, street-level situational awareness.”¹⁷⁵ One senior U.S. official described a case where the partner nation’s Minister of Defense made a direct request to the United States for assistance in disassembling and disinvesting in the Huawei Smart City program because of excessive Chinese monitoring.¹⁷⁶

Many of China’s economic and financial methods and approaches to the region will increasingly be considered in the context of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is an ambitious global investment and trade program designed to strengthen Chinese economic engagement with developing economies while advancing its political and strategic goals. In 2016, no country in the hemisphere was officially part of China’s BRI, but now 19 countries in the region (more than half) are officially part of programs tied directly to the BRI. In addition to infrastructure funding, these programs offer billions of dollars in “no strings attached” loans, donations of military equipment, and other security related engagements,¹⁷⁷ as depicted in Figure 3.4.

¹⁷⁴ Causwell, 2020.

¹⁷⁵ Faller, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Faller, 2020.

Figure 3.4. China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean



SOURCES: See Appendix G.

Finally, the American concept of “dollar diplomacy” was the idea of providing financial aid to foreign governments to promote U.S. commercial and political interests that began early in the 20th century under President William Howard Taft. That approach has been said to have been replaced with “yuan diplomacy.” Even international finance bodies, such as the World Bank and the IDB, were surpassed by Chinese development banks as early as 2014 in terms of total finance

provided to Latin American governments,¹⁷⁸ making China the top source of development finance in LAC.¹⁷⁹ Yuan diplomacy, along with other methods, has probably helped explain the increase in Latin American opinion polls that show perceptions that China is becoming increasingly influential across the region and that it has a more positive influence on the region than the United States.¹⁸⁰ For a more in-depth look at Chinese economic and financial activities in LAC, see Appendix B.

Building and Maintaining Relationships (*Guanxi*)

Developing social relationships at multiple levels is a central aspect of China's foreign policy and approach to diplomacy broadly. Various forums and initiatives are used to cultivate "personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness."¹⁸¹

In Mandarin, the term *guanxi* means *connections* or *relations*, with the term *guanxixue* meaning *international relations* or *international connections and relations*. Representatives of the Chinese government use favors, gifts, and banquets to build emotional and ethical bonds with foreign counterparts. The art of *guanxi* "places an emphasis on the binding power and emotional and ethical qualities of the personal relationships."¹⁸² *Guanxi* is sometimes also used to describe relationships that include bribery or illicit relationships.¹⁸³ As with the discussion about TCOs in the previous chapter, Chinese officials are more likely to encourage and benefit from corruption in the countries in which they do business, further eroding governance. Further, SOUTHCOM commander Faller has noted that the PRC recognizes that American strength in the region comes from its partnerships and alliances, so Beijing "uses its economic and technological clout to create conditions where partners are forced to choose sides."¹⁸⁴

As previously discussed, for government-to-government relationships the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs ranks countries in terms of importance. Beijing's most important state-level relationship is with Brazil; Brazil is LAC's largest economy, China's most significant trade partner, and part of the BRICS grouping.¹⁸⁵ The PRC also seeks to strengthen relationships with any government that has agreed to participate in the BRI, or potentially will. In addition to economic incentives, Beijing targets LAC countries for government-to-government relations for

¹⁷⁸ Gallagher, 2016, p. 65.

¹⁷⁹ Myers and Ray, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Gallagher, 2016, p. 66.

¹⁸¹ Benabdallah, 2020, p. 5.

¹⁸² Benabdallah, 2020, p. 51.

¹⁸³ Alexandra Wrage, "Bribery, Guanxi and Direct Marketing in the Herbalife China Settlement," *Forbes*, September 15, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Phelim Kine, "Adm. Faller: China Exploiting Corruption in Latin America," *Politico*, August 12, 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Jenkins, 2019, p. 300. "BRICS" refers to Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

political reasons, such as those that still recognize Taiwan or those that could be pulled away from traditional relationships with Washington.¹⁸⁶ U.S. officials note that China maintains a close watch on changes to regional governments and is acutely aware of the implications for potential geopolitical relations—the Chinese leadership is also reportedly very quick to invest in, make visits to, and generally take advantage of changing political dynamics in LAC capitals.¹⁸⁷

Chinese diplomatic presence in the Western Hemisphere has recently grown to rival that of the United States. The PRC maintains a presence in all LAC countries that do not recognize Taiwan, including in a few small Caribbean states where the United States has no permanent presence. In fact, if one excludes the U.S. consulates in Mexico, China has only one less diplomatic post than the United States in the region. This century, China has established six embassies (all in small countries that previously recognized Taiwan) and two consulates in the region, highlighting a push to aggressively broaden engagement with a region traditionally in the United States' domain. Although nine LAC countries continue to recognize Taiwan—the most of any region in the world—which limits Beijing's engagement, China's spread of consulates throughout the region helps augment its diplomatic depth and presence. In the face of the pandemic and its consequences, it would be unsurprising if some of these nine countries follow the path of their neighbors and break relations with Taiwan to access Chinese capital and the Chinese market. This official diplomatic expansion is portrayed in Figure 3.5.

Senior Chinese officials make numerous state-level visits to LAC and frequently invite national leaders of the region to China. Between 2015 and 2018, the PRC's top three officials dealing with foreign relations—President Xi Jinping, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Prime Minister Li Keqiang—made a combined 29 visits to Latin America. Dozens of other senior officials made public visits, as well.¹⁸⁸ According to one expert, Beijing is comfortable maintaining personal and often informal relationships even at senior levels rather than trying to institutionalize formal agreements, as long as the partnerships remain strong.¹⁸⁹ Beijing pursues these relationships through a “multi-tiered strategy,” with Chinese ambassadors encouraging Chinese companies to engage with mayors and governors to secure contracts and develop relationships at local and regional levels.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

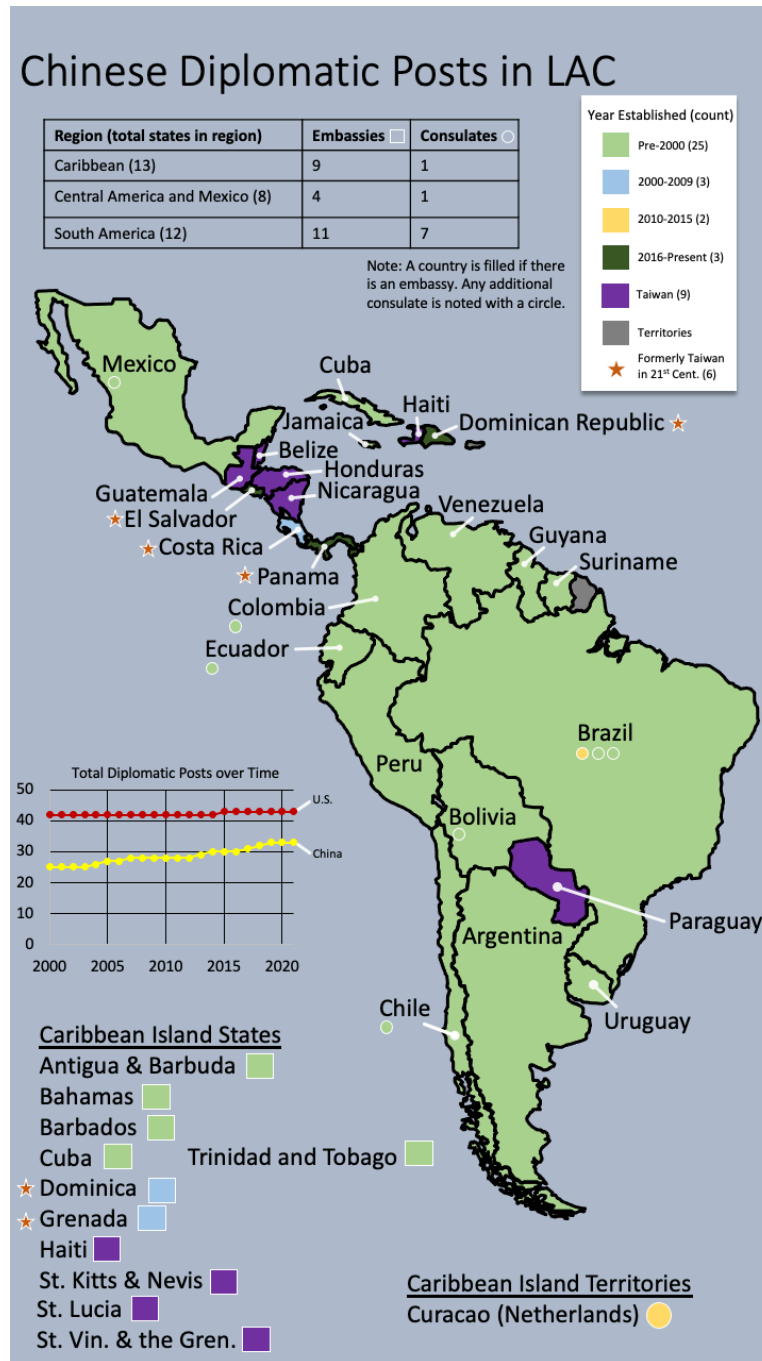
¹⁸⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Douglas Farah and Kathryn Babineau, “Extra-Regional Actors in Latin America: The United States is Not the Only Game in Town,” National Defense University, *PRISM*, Vol. 8, No. 1, February 26, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with U.S. SME on Chinese affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean, May 4, 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with U.S. SME on Chinese affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean, May 4, 2021.

Figure 3.5. Chinese Diplomatic Posts in Latin American and Caribbean Countries



SOURCES: RAND analysis of data from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China diplomatic mission websites, such as those listed at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Consuls General,” undated.

A defining characteristic of Chinese foreign policy is the concept of noninterference, which has been a foundational principle for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since the 1950s. The noninterference principle is articulated as China’s respect for state sovereignty and a promise to avoid interfering with another country’s internal affairs. In practice, Beijing has not lived up to

this promise on multiple occasions, but the rhetoric is powerful and today helps the PRC avoid foreign governments from critiquing China's own problematic internal affairs (secessionist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang, relations with Taiwan, crackdowns in Hong Kong, and Uyghur human rights issues, for example).¹⁹¹ China tries to present itself as a non-ideological and nonjudgmental alternative to traditional European and Western powers, which China claims have hegemonic or imperial motivations not shared by the PRC.¹⁹²

There is also some evidence to suggest that elements of the PRC also maintain relationships with, and in some cases support, TCOs in the region. As SOUTHCOM commander Faller has testified, China is believed to provide precursor chemicals for narcotics producers in Latin America and to serve as the primary source of money laundering for TCOs in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁹³ A senior official reiterated this point and argued that, aside from the funding stream this allows, there is the added benefit of damaging U.S. objectives. As this official stated, the Chinese “are helping TCOs because they know it’ll be in the U.S.’s worst interests.”¹⁹⁴ While those claims from senior U.S. officials seem to indict Chinese government officials directly, it is certainly possible that some Chinese companies and criminal organizations participate in illegal activities without government direction or backing.

Presenting an Alternative to Multilateral Organizations with U.S. Involvement

Chinese approaches to multilateral engagements in the region mostly center around the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Launched in 2011, CELAC is a multinational organization of 32 LAC permanent member countries and is described as an “intergovernmental mechanism for dialogue and political agreement,” which notably excludes the United States and Canada. According to its own website, “CELAC is the third largest economy in the world with a GDP of around \$7 trillion dollars and the largest food producer in the world and third largest producer of electricity.”¹⁹⁵ Beijing’s participation in CELAC summits has been a particularly welcome move for countries such as Venezuela that would like to advance multilateral arrangements that exclude the United States.¹⁹⁶

When CELAC met in Beijing for the first time in 2015, the group agreed to a five-year cooperation plan covering politics, security, trade, investment, finance, infrastructure, energy, resources, industry, agriculture, science, and people-to-people exchanges.¹⁹⁷ Some of the promises made by Beijing to CELAC members included providing 6,000 governmental scholarships, 6,000 training opportunities, and 400 opportunities for on-the-job master’s degree

¹⁹¹ Benabdallah, 2020, pp. 22–23.

¹⁹² Benabdallah, 2020, p. 71.

¹⁹³ U.S. Senate, Armed Services Committee, 2021.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, website, undated.

¹⁹⁶ Ellis, 2018, p. 210.

¹⁹⁷ Sutter, 2021, p. 294.

programs between 2015 and 2019 and an additional 6,000 government scholarships between 2019 and 2021. China also promised to bring more than 1,000 LAC political leaders and politicians to China and provide Chinese media training to LAC media professionals.¹⁹⁸ However, China-CELAC cooperation has been challenged to deliver other “meaningful multilateral engagements and projects.”¹⁹⁹ CELAC has been China’s primary instrument for multilateral engagement in the region, but Beijing has also established ties with or pursued admittance to other regional organizations, including the Organization of American States (OAS), the Association for Latin American Integration, the Caribbean Development Bank, and the IDB.²⁰⁰

Security Cooperation and Military Activities

Chinese approaches to presenting an alternative to the United States in LAC include arms sales, developing defense relationships, and filling other security cooperation and training voids left open by the United States. The PLA is also said to have interests in education, space, cyber, and naval ports, which may be “setting the stage for future military expansion and presence, just as we have seen in Djibouti.”²⁰¹

Arms Sales, Donations, and Deployments

The presence and sophistication of Chinese defense-industry companies in the region have expanded over the past decade. These companies now present Chinese military hardware at Latin American military trade shows, such as FIDAE in Chile, LAAD in Brazil, SITDEF in Peru, and Exponaval, sponsored by the Chilean navy.²⁰² One method that China employs is to enter into agreements with oil-producing countries to provide Chinese military hardware in exchange for oil. In the late 2000s, Ecuador joined Kenya, Morocco, Sudan, and Uganda to sign defense cooperation pacts with Beijing that traded their oil to meet Ecuadorian military requirements such as tactical transport aircraft, anti-tank guided weapons, surface-to-air missile systems, medium utility helicopters, and primary training aircraft.²⁰³ Chinese-based defense companies such as the NORINCO group have also given military equipment to LAC security forces.²⁰⁴

ALBA nations make up the majority of Chinese arms sales in the region, with Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador as the largest customers.²⁰⁵ Chinese representatives that maintain strong

¹⁹⁸ Sutter, 2021, p. 297.

¹⁹⁹ Ellis, 2018, p. 198.

²⁰⁰ Sutter, 2021, pp. 294–295.

²⁰¹ Kine, 2021.

²⁰² Ellis, 2020b.

²⁰³ Jon Grevatt, “China Extends Loan to Ecuador for Aircraft,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, November 26, 2009; Jon Grevatt, “Ecuador and China Agree Defence Co-Operation,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, October 15, 2008.

²⁰⁴ Ellis, 2021.

²⁰⁵ Sutter, 2021, p. 298.

relationships with anti-U.S. and populist governments and officials find the most opportunities for PRC-based arms suppliers,²⁰⁶ but such relationships are also subject to shifts in political orientations in national capitals. For example, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s administration intended to purchase nearly \$1 billion in Chinese weapon systems in 2015, but the deal stalled after a change in Buenos Aires.²⁰⁷ Similarly, a center-left government in Uruguay negotiated for a \$4.2 million warship, but that deal was stopped when a center-right candidate won elections in 2019.²⁰⁸ However, Chinese arms companies have moved beyond engaging only with ideological allies and are now involved in more independent countries, where they market military vehicles, heavy equipment, and electronics. Chinese defense-related donations and gifts have expanded from clothing and small arms to fighter aircraft, radars, armored combat vehicles, and military ships.²⁰⁹ Examples of major arms sales to LAC countries are provided in Table 3.1.

²⁰⁶ Ellis, 2020b.

²⁰⁷ Sutter, 2021, p. 298.

²⁰⁸ Ellis, 2020b.

²⁰⁹ Ellis, 2018, p. 205.

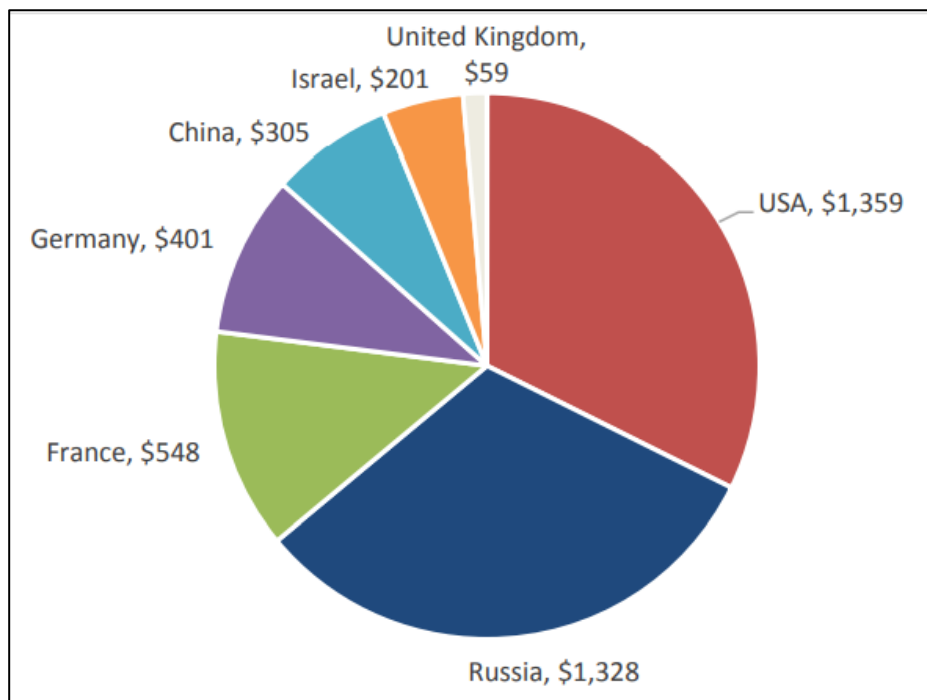
Table 3.1. Examples of Chinese Arms Sales to Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2000–2020

Country	Equipment
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WZ-551 armored personnel carriers
Bahamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiger armored personnel carriers
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiger armored personnel carriers • K-8 trainer/combat aircraft • AS365/AS565 Panther helicopters • Red Arrow-8 anti-tank missiles
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y-12 transport aircraft • Military Bridging Equipment
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unspecified Chinese-made military aircraft • Air defense radars • Type-85 twin anti-aircraft guns • HN-5 man-portable surface-to-air missiles • MA-60 transport aircraft • Various military vehicles
Guyana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y-12 light transport aircraft • Donated military construction equipment • Donated police vehicles
Jamaica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donated nonlethal defense gear
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model-56 105mm towed guns
Peru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FN-6 portable surface-to-air missiles • QW-11 portable surface-to-air missiles • Type-90 122mm self-propelled multiple rocket launchers • Various military vehicles
Trinidad and Tobago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type-718 offshore patrol vessels • Donated police motorcycles
Uruguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donated cars, buses, and other dual-use vehicles
Venezuela	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JYL-1 air search radars • K-8 trainer/combat aircraft • Y-8 transport aircraft • PL-5E short-range air-to-air missiles • Red Arrow-73 anti-tank missiles • SM-4 81mm self-propelled mortars • SR-5 self-propelled multiple rocket launchers • Type-07P infantry fighting vehicles • ZBD-05/VN-18 infantry fighting vehicles • VN-4 armored personnel carriers • ZTD-05 light tanks • C-802 anti-ship missiles

SOURCES: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, data generated June 25, 2021; Jon Grevatt, “China Extends Loan to Ecuador for Aircraft,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, November 26, 2009; R. Evan Ellis, “Chinese Security Engagement in Latin America,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2020b.

Official Chinese arms sales to the region, while expanding in scale and scope, still ranked fifth in total arms exports to LAC in the years between 2013 and 2017 (see Figure 3.6), well behind U.S. and Russian arms sales.²¹⁰

Figure 3.6. China’s Arms Sales to Latin American and Caribbean Countries Compared with Other Top Arms Exporters, 2013–2017 (\$ millions)



SOURCE: Katherine Koleski and Alec Blivas, *China’s Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, October 17, 2018, using data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database,” undated.

Despite the relative imbalance in quantitative value from arms sales between the United States and China, Beijing’s growing involvement in the sector is closely tied to its economic and political diplomacy objectives. As state-controlled institutions, Chinese defense companies are used to “build political influence and goodwill, garner support for China’s objectives in international forums, and influence decisions about access to natural resources and export markets.”²¹¹

Because of this, the emphasis on *guanxi* is a key element of the Chinese approach to regional military engagements. Arms sales and the implied sharing of technologies, training, and maintenance support help the PLA build and strengthen long-term relationships, as do PLA professional military education (PME) and training exchanges, discussed more below. These

²¹⁰ Katherine Koleski and Alec Blivas, *China’s Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, October 17, 2018.

²¹¹ Koleski and Blivas, 2018.

relationships and official visits also create opportunities to collect information on, and potentially compromise, officials from U.S. partner nations. In LAC countries that cannot afford, or for other reasons are not likely, to purchase Chinese military equipment, Chinese security-related donations and gifts create reasons for introducing Chinese defense officials and building relationships in otherwise pro-U.S. government institutions.²¹² The donations comprise equipment worth millions of U.S. dollars to countries every year that is difficult to measure along the same valuations as official international arms sales. China also benefits from a natural tendency toward reciprocity that can help keep relationships strong or be called on for favors in the future. U.S. security assistance in the Caribbean declined between 2009 and 2018, which created a void that Chinese security assistance and foreign direct investment sought to fill.²¹³ The United States is also known to suspend or reduce military support because of budgetary constraints or human rights concerns with partner nations. And whereas U.S. foreign military sales and foreign military finance systems are not known to be particularly agile in response to partner needs, Chinese alternatives are increasingly available to LAC governments and are not burdened with provisions that could be considered “interference” in domestic affairs.²¹⁴ Although U.S. military technologies, exercises, and other unit-level engagements remain objectively superior to that of the PLA, Chinese personal leverage over LAC officials and the potential for regime changes toward populist governments suggest that the United States should not overestimate its position as the security partner of choice in the region.²¹⁵ As China has increasingly developed military relationships with LAC governments, Chinese forces have been increasingly accepted into the region for deployments and exercises. The following examples depict the types of deployments and exercises PLA units have made in the region in recent years:

- **Haiti:** PLA military police deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2004 to 2012²¹⁶
- **Peru:** Combined earthquake response exercise in 2010²¹⁷
- **Caribbean:** PLA hospital ship Peace Ark deployed to Caribbean three times (2011, 2015, and 2018–2019)²¹⁸
- **Multinational:** Chinese naval flotilla with two guided missile frigates engaged in combat exercises with Chilean armed forces and navies of Argentina and Brazil, 2013²¹⁹
- **Cuba:** PLA Navy high-visibility port call to Havana, 2015²²⁰

²¹² Ellis, 2020b.

²¹³ Causwell, 2020.

²¹⁴ Ellis, 2018, p. 211.

²¹⁵ Ellis, 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Ellis, 2021.

²¹⁷ Ellis, 2018, p. 206.

²¹⁸ Ellis, 2020b.

²¹⁹ Ellis, 2018, p. 206.

²²⁰ Ellis, 2018, p. 206.

- **Argentina:** Joint operations to counter Chinese criminal groups such as Chinese triad Pi Xiu²²¹
- **Venezuela:** Venezuelan troops participated in China’s “Clear Sky” exercises, 2017;²²² PLA personnel participated in Venezuelan military parades.²²³

Professional Military Education and Official Exchanges

One security-cooperation area where China has been most aggressive has been the extensive professional military education (PME) and professional exchanges conducted between the PLA and LAC militaries. Training courses, generally conducted at sites in China, can range from weeks to over a year. Some courses focus on the operation and maintenance of Chinese military equipment sold to LAC countries.²²⁴ Others introduce foreign students to PLA military thought regarding operations and leadership,²²⁵ and in other cases senior LAC officials are educated on Chinese military doctrine.²²⁶

The PRC also sends its own personnel to some LAC nations for training in select schools, such as the Lanceros special warfare school in Colombia, the Brazilian Jungle Warfare School in Manaus, and the Brazilian Peacekeeping Operations Joint Training Center.²²⁷ However, China’s military PME outreach and professional exchanges reach every LAC country that officially recognizes Beijing.²²⁸ As a few examples, Peruvian military officers attend China’s National Defense University and Chinese army and navy command schools.²²⁹ Ecuador and Chile regularly send military officials to China for PME courses.²³⁰ And Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries send officers to China to learn Chinese language and culture and to attend command and staff courses. It is unclear how much practical benefit LAC officials receive from Chinese training, or how appropriate PLA doctrine is for liberal democracies for that matter. However, from Beijing’s perspective, this outreach is not primarily about education and regional security but rather cultivating relationships.²³¹

Because of its investments in PME programs and expansion of Spanish-language capabilities, China now provides much better military training than in the past, and China is a much more

²²¹ Ellis, 2020b.

²²² Berg and Brands, 2021.

²²³ Ellis, 2020b.

²²⁴ Ellis, 2018, pp. 205–206.

²²⁵ Causwell, 2020.

²²⁶ Berg and Brands, 2021.

²²⁷ Ellis, 2020b.

²²⁸ Sutter, 2021, p. 298.

²²⁹ Ellis, 2020b.

²³⁰ Ellis, 2020b.

²³¹ Causwell, 2020.

advanced competitor in this space than is commonly recognized. LAC governments are often open to accepting any “free” training, and officials that receive perks, such as traveling with their families, have proven to be enthusiastic students.²³² Beijing also pays for students to travel in business class, stay in five-star hotels, and have other expenses paid for them while in China—none of which are generally offered through U.S. programs. By 2015, “China for the first time trained more Latin American military officers than the United States, and the difference has grown every year since.”²³³ At a January 2020 congressional hearing, Faller noted that China was sending five times more LAC students to its war college than the United States and that the war college course on offer in China was in actuality a copy of U.S. doctrine translated into Spanish. During that hearing, it was also suggested that in El Salvador, China offered 50 PME exchange opportunities compared to one U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) slot for the country.²³⁴

According to U.S. officials, these low-cost PME exchange programs have outsized impacts that will have significant effects in future years. One official recalled a South American general officer who had attended multiple U.S. IMET programs throughout their career, served as a partner within SOUTHCOM, and now provides a direct channel for the United States in their home country. Alternatively, a different member of a Caribbean nation’s military who participated in a Chinese PME program had returned home with a noticeably changed and negative attitude toward the United States, one the U.S. official thought likely to remain with that officer as they progress further through the ranks. The cost of such long-term benefits from these types of programs, the official concluded, is “peanuts” in comparison to other DoD managed programs and justifies increased IMET opportunities.²³⁵

In addition to peeling away traditional American allies through training and PME relationships, those partners that U.S. forces still do engage with may now have direct connections to the Chinese government through their professional programs. This adds a degree of operational security risk regarding U.S. practices and technologies that could more easily reach the PLA.²³⁶

Despite the advances China has made in military cooperation and defense-related relationships, Beijing has thus far not expressed interest in establishing permanent military facilities in LAC. The PLA has also generally avoided exercises in the region that would be

²³² Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 24, 2021; interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021; interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

²³³ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²³⁴ U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on United States Africa Command and United States Southern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2021 and the Future Years Defense Program*, Washington, D.C., January 30, 2020.

²³⁵ Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 24, 2021.

²³⁶ Ellis, 2018, pp. 210–211.

overly provocative to the United States.²³⁷ However, many of the infrastructure projects Chinese companies and investors are involved in have obvious dual-use capabilities, particularly seaports.²³⁸ Further, in the case of a conflict, LAC governments dependent on Beijing could be pressured to deny support to U.S. forces and provide military access to PLA units that could also benefit from the well-developed commercial logistics infrastructure and networks.²³⁹

One potential exception in seeking permanent facilities is in Argentina, where Beijing recognizes South America's "strategic location for space activity."²⁴⁰ An agreement with the Argentine government was negotiated to build a Chinese satellite-tracking station in Argentina's Patagonian region.²⁴¹ The station is managed by China Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC), which reports to the PLA's Strategic Support Force. Beijing's official position is that the site is intended only for peaceful space activities,²⁴² but experts say it could have military uses as well.²⁴³ Further, China's State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) has a long-standing space relationship with Brazil through the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) program. During consecutive Five-Year Plans, China announced that it was seeking to expand such space cooperation not only with Brazil but also with other international partners, including Russia, France, Ukraine, Venezuela, Pakistan, Bolivia, Belarus, and the European Union.²⁴⁴

Information Domain and Soft Power

As will be shown in the case of Russia, Beijing invests significantly in shaping the narrative of China's regional presence and global standing in LAC. A 2018 Asia Dialogue article stated:

In true digital age fashion, Chinese outlets in Latin America have skipped over traditional print media in favor of virtual platforms, which host content tailored to local audiences. Though slightly less up-to-date than their Chinese-language versions, newspapers Xinhua and People's Daily produce daily Spanish and Portuguese-language content, as does China Radio International (CRI). China Central Television (CCTV), meanwhile, boasts a 24-hour channel, CGTN Spanish, which is available online, free of charge. Even the magazine China Today, which remains one of the few examples of Chinese print media in Latin America, maintains not one, but two Spanish-language websites, in addition to its two print publications in Mexico and Peru. Nearly all of these outlets have

²³⁷ Ellis, 2018, p. 206; Ellis, 2020b.

²³⁸ Interview with U.S. SME, May 4, 2021.

²³⁹ Ellis, 2021.

²⁴⁰ Faller, 2020.

²⁴¹ McDowall, 2014.

²⁴² Cassandra Garrison, "China's Military-Run Space Station in Argentina Is a 'Black Box,'" Reuters, January 31, 2019.

²⁴³ "A Golden Opportunity," 2016.

²⁴⁴ Jon Grevatt, "China Aims to Expand Space Collaboration in Next Five Years," *Jane's Defence Industry*, January 8, 2016.

Spanish-language accounts on social media that are banned in China, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.²⁴⁵

Xinhua maintains 21 bureaus across 19 LAC countries servicing 200 media subscribers and 200 non-media subscribers, such as regional government ministries. Xinhua’s director said that the organization is intended to “play a larger role in shaping a China, Latin America and Caribbean community of common destiny.”²⁴⁶ Analysis of Xinhua content, however, shows a propensity to color Chinese initiatives in disingenuous terms. For example, Chinese analysts prioritize the BRI’s benefits to China’s national security interests, access to vital sea lines of communication, dual-use infrastructure for Chinese naval operations, and increasing Beijing’s political influence globally. State-ran media outlets in LAC, on the other hand, paint a picture of the BRI initiative being a win-win economic opportunity for countries in the region.²⁴⁷ As one U.S. official stated, China uses the media space primarily to improve its overall image and garner political and commercial support.²⁴⁸

China also maintains more than 53 Confucius Institutes in the region that provide government-approved education on Chinese language and culture. The institutes also sponsor LAC students who travel to China under official educational exchanges and cultural engagements.²⁴⁹ Eleven Confucius Classrooms in the region reportedly serve more than 50,000 students and host cultural activities that have involved more than 8 million people. As with its media outreach, Beijing uses these institutions to control the discourse about China and downplay reports of corrupt business and government-to-government practices.²⁵⁰ Chinese “friendship societies” also maintain unofficial relationships with political actors throughout LAC countries where official diplomatic relationships have not yet been fostered.²⁵¹ According to one Latin American studies expert, an inordinate amount of these regional leaders receive training and education in China and partially owe their political positions to the practices they learn in China.²⁵²

Russia in the Western Hemisphere

As with China, Russian activities in LAC represent part of a larger global competition that cannot be viewed through a single hemispheric lens. Moscow’s policies for the Western

²⁴⁵ Ricardo Barrios, “China’s State Media in Latin America: Profile and Prospects,” *Asia Dialogue*, May 28, 2018, quoted in Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁴⁶ “Xinhua News Agency Ready to Deepen Media Cooperation in LatAm: Xinhua President,” *Xinhua*, November 26, 2016, quoted in Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁴⁷ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁴⁸ Interview with U.S. SME on Chinese affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean, May 4, 2021.

²⁴⁹ Ellis, 2018, pp. 201–202.

²⁵⁰ Sutter, 2021, p. 297.

²⁵¹ Ellis, 2018, p. 201.

²⁵² Interview with U.S. SME on Latin American studies, April 29, 2021.

Hemisphere are often shaped by its perceptions of threats and aggression from the United States and Europe in former Soviet territories instead of a deliberate, long-term strategy for the region. Still, this approach includes numerous challenges to U.S. interests, particularly as relations between Russia and the West decline. Additionally, Moscow remains highly opportunistic. Despite having far less to offer the governments and communities of the region, Russia will act as a spoiler of U.S. initiatives and will readily fill gaps as they emerge.

Background

From Moscow's perspective, Russia lost considerable standing and influence in LAC during the 1990s. When Vladimir Putin came to power at the turn of the century, Russia adopted the Primakov Doctrine,²⁵³ which redirected some of Russia's foreign policy farther abroad, including back to the Western Hemisphere.²⁵⁴ Since the end of the Cold War, Russian involvement in the Western Hemisphere has still represented a fraction of Russia's other ambitions in its near abroad and other parts of the world, albeit with two significant exceptions in 2008 and 2014, discussed below.²⁵⁵ In general, Russia's engagements with LAC in recent decades can be thought of as belonging to one of three broad categories:

- direct responses to antagonism with the United States in other parts of the world
- opportunism that takes advantage of voids left by U.S. disinterest and disengagement
- partnering with likeminded antiliberal governments.

An example of the first category occurred after Russian forces invaded the Republic of Georgia and supported the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008. The United States deployed naval forces to the Black Sea in response. Russia reacted to the U.S. naval deployment with a series of actions in America's own hemisphere: Nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers deployed to Venezuela and conducted flights around the Caribbean, four Russian naval ships conducted exercises with the Venezuelan navy with port calls in Cuba and Nicaragua, and President Dmitry Medvedev participated in ALBA's leadership summit. Following U.S. criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014, another surge of Russian activity in LAC was observed.²⁵⁶ Russia has historical links to the region dating back to the Cold

²⁵³ The Primakov Doctrine posits that a unipolar world dominated by the United States is unacceptable to Russia and offers the following principles for Russian foreign policy: (1) Russia should strive toward a multipolar world managed by a concert of major powers that can counterbalance U.S. unilateral power, (2) Russia should insist on its primacy in the post-Soviet space and lead integration in that region, and (3) Russia should oppose NATO expansion (Eugene Rumer, "The Primakov [Not Gerasimov] Doctrine in Action," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2019).

²⁵⁴ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

²⁵⁵ Jean Carlos Baez Rosario and Richard Miles, "Virtual Russian Influence in Latin America," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 9, 2018.

²⁵⁶ R. Evan Ellis, "The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic Position, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past," in Stuart Santiago, ed., *Russia in Latin America*, Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2016, pp. 4-5.

War, but Russia's interest in the region today derives more from the breakdown in cooperation between Russia and the West and the growing role of China there; Moscow ultimately wants to demonstrate that Russia competes on the global stage with world powers, including in America's backyard.²⁵⁷

With regard to the second category, U.S. foreign policy is focused elsewhere in the world, including wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan and its pivot toward Asia, and many observers believe that America's "benign neglect" and deprioritization of LAC left a political vacuum in the region. While not engaging at the same scale economically as China or the United States, Russia has found several ways to inject itself to fill parts of that vacuum. Finally, a number of LAC governments have been ideologically welcoming of Russia's engagement in the region.²⁵⁸ Cuba and Nicaragua, former Soviet-era allies, have led this club, although Venezuela and, to a lesser degree, Bolivia and Ecuador have also provided opportunities for greater Russian engagement in recent years. Recent Russian goals and activities still broadly fall in these three categories but have also taken on different forms.

Russia's Goals and Objectives in the Western Hemisphere

Compared with Chinese activities in the region, Moscow has a limited set of objectives largely focused on specific countries and economic sectors, primarily arms sales.²⁵⁹ However, officials have noticed an increase of Russian activities in the region in recent years. Particularly as Moscow has perceived greater U.S. activity around Russian interests elsewhere, this increased activity suggests a greater emphasis being placed on their goals in the region.²⁶⁰ In this section, we describe five national objectives Moscow has in LAC.

Gain International Support for Russian Interests

Moscow views LAC countries as opportunities to weaken U.S. influence in international, multilateral forums like the UN and bolster support for Russian initiatives. LAC governments have not joined U.S.-led sanctions against Russian individuals,²⁶¹ and when sanctions followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Moscow was able to rely on Latin America as a food supplier, in defiance of U.S. and European sanctions.²⁶² As relations with the West have waned, Russia has a need for political allies where it can find them. "Russia needs friends, not only in

²⁵⁷ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

²⁵⁸ Jose de Arimateia da Cruz, "Strategic Insights: From Ideology to Geopolitics: Russian Interests in Latin America," in Stuart Santiago, ed., *Russia in Latin America*, Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2016, p. 87.

²⁵⁹ R. Evan Ellis, "Russian Engagement in Latin America: An Update," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 19, 2017.

²⁶⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

²⁶¹ Morgus et al., 2019.

²⁶² Ellis, 2016, pp. 56–57.

trade but also at the UN, and it is looking for them wherever it can,” according to Diana Negroponte, a Cold War specialist at the Wilson Center.²⁶³ For example, when the Argentine government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had legal disputes with “holdout” hedge funds, Putin provided his support. In return, Argentina abstained in a UN vote over Russia’s annexation of Crimea.²⁶⁴ The Kremlin would like to maintain LAC support on the international stage when other Western governments try to hold it accountable for aggressive and criminal activities globally.

Promote Russia’s National Image at Home and in the Region

Russia’s success in wielding influence through the information domain provides Moscow with a relatively inexpensive technique to shape opinions both domestically and in the Western hemisphere. Russia seeks to undermine democratic institutions in general,²⁶⁵ and in doing so presents its own population with evidence that Western approaches to democracy are ineffective. Undermining democratic values internationally also has potential gains for Russian leaders back home as President Vladimir Putin, and previously Medvedev, benefit from the Russian state and political system apparently returning to a position of strength on the world stage.²⁶⁶ As Russian state-run media has expanded aggressively in LAC in recent years, one report suggested that the overall aim of those efforts is also to encourage pro-Russian sentiment throughout the region. Moscow seeks to shift the image of Russia as a continuation of the Soviet Union to one as a modern, technologically advanced, preeminent power.²⁶⁷ Achieving great-power status is Moscow’s ultimate goal, and it sees opportunities to advance that objective in parts of LAC.²⁶⁸

Undermine Democracy and the United States to Achieve a “Post-West World Order”

In addition to promoting its national image, Moscow’s media pursuits suggest an ideological objective in LAC. The Kremlin seeks to undermine democracy throughout the region in ways that can provide legitimacy for its own authoritarian practices back in Russia. Populist and undemocratic politicians in LAC generally exhibit favorable views of Russia, and Moscow has proved willing to enable them when possible. Putin would like to see his form of authoritarianism spread and provide an alternative to the liberal democratic order supported by the United States and Europe. Since many LAC countries are part of the Cold War–era Non-

²⁶³ Quoted in Benedict Mander, “Russia Is Looking for Allies, Not Deals, in Latin America,” *Financial Times*, April 26, 2015.

²⁶⁴ Mander, 2015.

²⁶⁵ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

²⁶⁶ Ellis, 2016, p. 9.

²⁶⁷ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁶⁸ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

Aligned Movement, the Kremlin views them as potential swing states on international policy issues.²⁶⁹

Obtain Military Access and Strategic Posture

One of Russia's principle military objectives in LAC is to "develop and maintain access to critical military and infrastructure systems."²⁷⁰ The region's proximity to the United States creates opportunities for Moscow to threaten the U.S. homeland in the case of a conflict between the two powers in other parts of the world, thus pulling resources away from any U.S. military efforts to counter Russia in Europe, for example.²⁷¹ If Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, or other LAC countries agree to host Russian military forces, Russian nuclear capable platforms, in addition to irregular forces, can be maintained in America's backyard.²⁷² Further, Cuba's close proximity to the United States allows Russia to collect intelligence on its American adversary.²⁷³ Overall, the Kremlin views LAC's geographic proximity to the United States as America's "near abroad." Thus, Moscow seeks the capability to reciprocate any U.S. activities that Russia views as provocative in its own near abroad.²⁷⁴

Develop Economic Activity and Avoid Sanctions

Russia's economic activity in LAC is far smaller than that of the United States and China. Russian exports to global markets primarily consist of arms, energy, and metals, and LAC still represents a small fraction of their total exports.²⁷⁵ Russia gains foreign currency from electricity infrastructure projects²⁷⁶ and space services and sells limited amounts of vehicles and other goods to Cuba and a few other countries.²⁷⁷ On the other side of the ledger, after sanctions prevented imports from traditional trading partners in Europe and the United States, Russia turned to LAC countries to boost food supplies, particularly from Argentina and Brazil.²⁷⁸ Thus, boosting Russian resiliency in the face of future economic challenges is another goal for Moscow in the region.

²⁶⁹ Morgus et al., 2019.

²⁷⁰ Morgus et al., 2019.

²⁷¹ Ellis, 2016, p. 9.

²⁷² Ellis, 2016, pp. 57–58.

²⁷³ Ben Vogel, "Russia-Latin America Trade Relations May Give Cover to Intelligence Operations, Says SOUTHCOM Chief," *Jane's Defence Industry*, July 10, 2019.

²⁷⁴ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

²⁷⁵ Morgus et al., 2019.

²⁷⁶ Ellis, 2016, p. 9.

²⁷⁷ Ellis, 2017.

²⁷⁸ Mander, 2015.

Russia's Approach: Investments, Programs, and Partnerships

Since Putin assumed power in 2000, Russia has intensified its presence in LAC. However, when compared with other parts of the world, the region still doesn't represent a significant priority for Moscow.²⁷⁹ Still, Russia has sought to partner with like-minded governments, particularly those with leftist and undemocratic ideologies, and has found low-cost, efficient techniques for pursuing its interests in America's backyard.²⁸⁰ In general, Moscow considers the Western Hemisphere to be organized into different groups of countries that shape how Russia engages in the region.²⁸¹

1. former Soviet-era allies, such as Cuba and Nicaragua
2. the broader group of states willing to assume the political risk of working with Russia against U.S. influence in the region, such as Venezuela, and to a lesser degree, Bolivia and Ecuador
3. states neither opposed to the United States nor Russia, but in which Russia has a strategic commercial interest.

Russia's most important political partners in the region are those of the first group (Cuba and Nicaragua) and, more recently, Venezuela's Maduro regime,²⁸² which has become heavily reliant on Moscow for survival. But the Kremlin remains highly opportunistic and has sought to deepen ties with any national governments that have come to power with authoritarian or anti-U.S. sentiments (effectively any country that joins Group 2 following a change in national leadership). Russia also seeks to exacerbate and take advantage of any tensions created by regional or U.S. policies²⁸³ and exploit polarizations within and between countries.²⁸⁴ In this section, we review how Russia engages in the region, primarily with countries in the first two groups identified above, along several lines of effort simultaneously and as efficiently as possible. All of this done with the instrumental objective of displacing U.S. influence wherever opportunities exist.²⁸⁵

Regional Diplomacy Favoring Anti-US Governments

Politically, Russia benefits from three factors that support its diplomatic outreach in the Western Hemisphere: (1) the absence of historical conflicts between Russia and the countries of the region, (2) the historical ties created during the Cold War, and (3) the pragmatic approach that both Moscow and many LAC governments adopt toward their bilateral relationships.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁹ Mira Milosevich-Juaristi, *Russia in Latin America: Repercussions for Spain*, Madrid, Spain: Elcano Royal Institute, July 10, 2020.

²⁸⁰ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

²⁸¹ Ellis, 2016, p. 10.

²⁸² Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

²⁸³ Gurganus, 2018.

²⁸⁴ Gurganus, 2018.

²⁸⁵ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁸⁶ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

Unlike in the Cold War, though, Russia no longer relies on the ideology of socialism to develop and expand its partnerships in the region. Instead, it now heavily relies on anti-U.S. sentiments in the governments of its Cold War allies Cuba and Nicaragua, and more recently Venezuela, for its diplomatic presence in LAC and to message that Moscow is willing to challenge Washington.²⁸⁷ The relationships Russia maintains with the authoritarian and anti-U.S. governments of those three countries provide Moscow with a relatively low-cost ability to play the role of “spoiler” in discrediting and frustrating U.S. foreign policy objectives.²⁸⁸

Those select diplomatic links in the region remain very important to Moscow, particularly when exercising its influence in the UN. That said, many other LAC countries have a relatively pro-Russian stance,²⁸⁹ or, at a minimum, affirm foreign policy independence from the United States. Using the Gerasimov Doctrine as a framework for managing Russian strategy and tactics, Russia’s approach seeks to both expand and deepen its regional ties beyond its traditional allies. The ALBA bloc provides an opportunity for Russia to engage with other countries that also share a strong anti-U.S. ideology and/or have had deeply criminalized governments that could be exploited such as Bolivia, El Salvador, and Suriname.²⁹⁰ One of the tools Moscow uses to keep its relationships strong and promote its image of a great power are high-level diplomatic visits to the region, arguably more than Russia’s strategic interests would otherwise suggest.²⁹¹ As portrayed in Figure 3.7, Moscow conducted 43 of these visits to the region between 2000 and 2017.

²⁸⁷ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020; interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

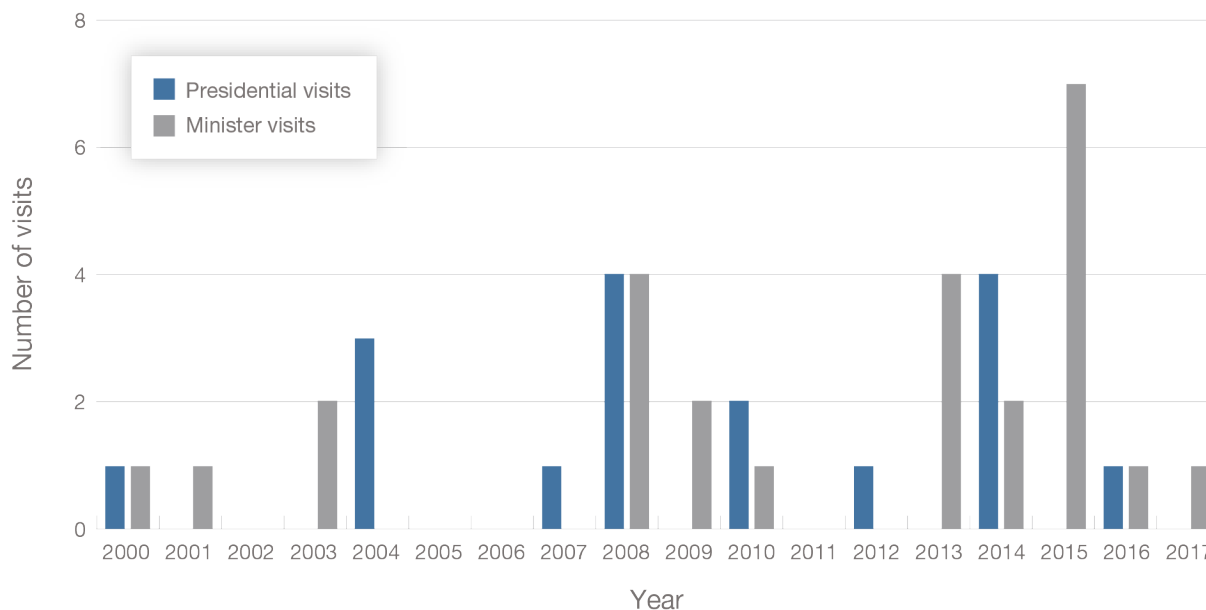
²⁸⁸ Faller, 2020.

²⁸⁹ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

²⁹⁰ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁹¹ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

Figure 3.7. High-Level Russian Visits to Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2000–2017



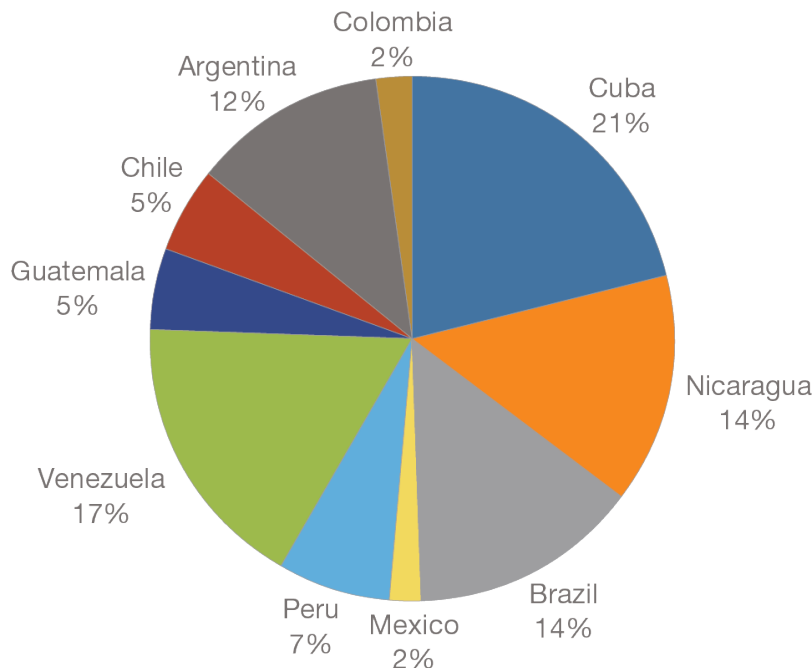
SOURCES: Adapted from Jean Carlos Baez Rosario and Richard Miles, “Virtual Russian Influence in Latin America,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 9, 2018; Kremlin data and press reports.

These frequent high-level government visits to the region indicate Moscow’s desire to strengthen its diplomatic foothold in LAC. A comparison of engagements between 2015 to 2017 shows that Russian and Latin American senior government officials (the equivalent of an assistant secretary or above) met more often than those of United States and Latin American senior officials.²⁹² However, over half of Russia’s high-level visits during that time period were still to Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua,²⁹³ as shown in Figure 3.8.

²⁹² Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁹³ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

Figure 3.8. High-Level Russian Visits to Latin America, by Country, 2000–2017



SOURCES: Adapted from Rosario and Miles, 2018; Kremlin data and press reports.

During that same 2015–2017 period, Latin American officials from about 20 countries made 44 high-level visits to Russia.²⁹⁴ Mirroring Russian high-level visits, the majority of all LAC visits to Russia from 2008 to 2017 were conducted by just five countries: Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Argentina.²⁹⁵

Russia’s bilateral relationship with Venezuela is largely politically motivated as Venezuela ranks 29th in terms of Russian international trade. Whereas the United States has threatened the Maduro regime with military intervention and squeezed it with financial sanctions, Russia has stepped in to serve as Caracas’s political and financial lifeline.²⁹⁶ In 2017, Moscow refinanced \$3.15 billion of loans to Venezuela, deferring most payments until after 2023, for which Russia gained preferential access to Venezuela’s large oil reserves.²⁹⁷ Many of Russia’s official government visits to Venezuela have been augmented by the very influential CEO of Rosneft, Russia’s state-run oil company, who also shares close personal relationships with Venezuela’s elites.²⁹⁸ Rosneft has been vital to the ability of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, to sustain operations and collaborate in a number of joint ventures that

²⁹⁴ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

²⁹⁵ Gurganus, 2018.

²⁹⁶ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

²⁹⁷ Gurganus, 2018.

²⁹⁸ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

have placed Russia in a good position to maintain a presence in Venezuela in the event of Maduro losing power in the future.²⁹⁹

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Nicaragua date back to the Cold War and the rule of Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) from 1979 to 1990. When Daniel Ortega of the FSLN returned to power in 2007, the relationship was renewed and Nicaragua recognized the dissident republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 2008 Georgian War.³⁰⁰ When President Ortega announced in 2013 a plan to build an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua rivaling the Panama Canal, to be financed by a Chinese billionaire, Russia was also to play a role. The tripartite agreement between Nicaragua, China, and Russia assigned Russia the role of guarding the construction site and patrolling Nicaragua's coastlines with "warships and aircraft."³⁰¹ The plan was later called "a propaganda game, a media show to continue generating false hopes of future prosperity among Nicaraguans" and a "means to launder money."³⁰² The project failed to ever make much, if any, headway. Still, Moscow maintains a special relationship with Nicaragua, one that would be even more important in LAC if the continual deterioration of Venezuela were to call the reliability of the Maduro regime into question.³⁰³

Cuba is Russia's other Cold War partner with which Moscow has been enthusiastic to rejuvenate relations. Cuba has been the destination of multiple high-level Russian visits, including those by both Presidents Medvedev and Putin, often accompanied with bilateral agreements being reached on a range of issues. In recent years, Moscow has written off \$30 billion of Havana's debt, financed much of Cuba's military modernization, and invested in a railway system and their energy sector. Rosneft has helped compensate for the drop in Venezuelan oil with its own shipments to the island.³⁰⁴ In addition to financing, technology, and development aid, Russia is a significant ally for Cuba within international organizations.³⁰⁵

In return, Cuba's strategic location makes it an appealing site for collecting intelligence on the United States. Additionally, a GLONASS facility to track satellites and communications has also been established in Cuba.³⁰⁶ Russian companies have also built power-generation facilities and manufacture vehicles on the island.³⁰⁷ Cuba's closest ally, Venezuela, is in disarray and cannot provide the support it once did at a time in which Cuba is experiencing economic strain

²⁹⁹ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁰⁰ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³⁰¹ de Arimateia da Cruz, 2016, p. 85.

³⁰² Nicholas Muller, "Nicaragua's Chinese-Financed Canal Project Still in Limbo," *The Diplomat*, August 20, 2019.

³⁰³ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁰⁴ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁰⁵ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³⁰⁶ Gurganus, 2018. GLONASS is Russia's version of the Global Positioning System (GPS).

³⁰⁷ Ellis, 2017.

and growth stagnation.³⁰⁸ For Moscow, Cuba represents an opportunity to advance nearly all of its LAC-related objectives discussed above.

The 13-year presidency of Evo Morales in Bolivia provided Russia with another ALBA country to engage and develop a political relationship. The 2008 civil unrest in Bolivia led to accusations of Washington supporting groups opposed to Morales and both countries expelling their respective ambassadors, which exacerbated Morales's anti-U.S. stance. This provided Moscow an opportunity to develop stronger ties with the like-minded government in La Paz.³⁰⁹ In 2009, Morales became the first Bolivian president to visit Russia, and political favors followed. For example, when Russia opposed U.S.-backed UN resolutions condemning chemical weapon use in Syria in 2017 and 2018, Bolivia followed suit. The two countries have also agreed to joint initiatives in the energy industry.³¹⁰ Morales's resignation in 2019 offered a potential shift in Bolivian foreign policy. However, since the election of Morales's protégé, Luis Arce, in 2020, both Russian and Bolivian media have spoken of restoring and strengthening relations between the two countries in multiple areas, including greater military cooperation.³¹¹

In El Salvador, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) party held the presidency for ten years between 2009 and 2019. Russia was able to lean on the former Soviet Union's support for the FMLN's guerilla army during El Salvador's civil war (1979–1992) to develop another reliable bilateral partnership.³¹² With the rise to power of populist President Nayib Bukele in 2019, Russia may find San Salvador equally open to diplomatic relations. In May 2021, Bukele was reported to have said, “We are very enthusiastic about strengthening the relationship with Russia, we are facing a world with new challenges and opportunities, and we want to take advantage of those opportunities” and added that El Salvador recognizes “the importance of Russia in the world.”³¹³ Russia has also reached out to nations traditionally aligned with the United States, such as Brazil and Peru, offering alternatives to the United States on issues ranging across trade and development, narcotrafficking and organized crime, and standards for democracy and human rights.³¹⁴

In addition to its bilateral relationships, Moscow has also sought involvement with multinational organizations in the region. ALBA represents a natural partner, given many of its member states' anti-U.S. views and desire to “create economic alternatives to Western-

³⁰⁸ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁰⁹ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³¹⁰ Gurganus, 2018.

³¹¹ “Bolivia to Restore Relations with Russia, President Arce Says,” *Sputnik*, October 26, 2020; “Bolivia Wants to Expand Cooperation with Russia to Strengthen the Armed Forces,” *Zona Publica TV*, June 24, 2021.

³¹² Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³¹³ Muhammad Irfan, “El Salvador ‘Very Enthusiastic’ About Bolstering Ties with Russia—President,” *UrduPoint*, May 20, 2021.

³¹⁴ Ellis, 2016, p. 56.

dominated financial institutions.”³¹⁵ Although Russia “encourages discourse against ‘U.S. hegemony’ at the forum of ALBA nations,” some ALBA members have not reciprocated with the same level of support as those with closer bilateral ties to Moscow, and Russia declined the role of official observer in the bloc.³¹⁶ Moscow also maintains close ties with CELAC, the Union of South American Nations (USAN), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and CARICOM, which boosts Russia’s presence in the region and provides platforms to promote the exclusion of the United States in LAC affairs.³¹⁷

Information Operations and Russian Propaganda

Russian information operations, including the spreading of false, state-generated propaganda, constitute a broad and common method for pursuing the Kremlin’s interest around the world. Examples of Russian state-linked media promoting anti-U.S. and pro-Russian information can be found throughout the Western Hemisphere.³¹⁸ Although Russia may not be able to invest heavily in other forms of power, the information space provides a lower cost avenue to exert influence and reach LAC citizens virtually. Significant increases in Russian use of information operations in the region began in earnest following the Georgian War in 2008.³¹⁹ The three areas of greatest interest are Russia’s use of state-sponsored media, the potential for it to be used in election meddling, and the distribution of Russian cultural institutes.

Starting in 2009, Russia significantly increased its media reach in LAC, primarily through the state-sponsored television channels and associated websites of RT Español and Sputnik Mundo.³²⁰ RT and Sputnik have expanded their Spanish- and Portuguese-language coverage throughout the region.³²¹ By the end of 2017, RT Español could be viewed as a separate channel in nearly all of LAC and was distributed by over 300 cable television providers. Some of RT Español’s content is also rebroadcast by other stations in the region,³²² including teleSUR, launched by Hugo Chavez to spread radical populist ideology of the Bolivarian Revolution, and Iran’s HispanTV.³²³ It can also be accessed through its free website at any time.³²⁴ One U.S.

³¹⁵ Gurganus, 2018.

³¹⁶ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³¹⁷ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³¹⁸ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³¹⁹ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

³²⁰ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021; Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³²¹ Morgus et al., 2019.

³²² Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³²³ Douglas Farah and Alexa Tavarez, “Iran in Latin America: Malign Alliances, ‘Super Spreaders,’ and Alternative Narratives,” National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C., June 2021.

³²⁴ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

official noted that RT Español and Sputnik Mundo are now the most-read social media news sites in the region (though this is difficult to corroborate with open-source data).³²⁵

To attract viewers, RT focuses on issues of interest to Latin American audiences “offering an ‘alternative point of view’ on issues such as human rights, war crimes and corruption. In short, not only does it whitewash Russia’s role in global affairs, it also presents the country as a successful alternative political model to liberal democracy.”³²⁶ Both channels present pro-Russia and anti-U.S. messaging and emphasize the value of Russian aid and assistance to the region. Much of this messaging is targeted toward ALBA countries, and ALBA-run programs reproduce and amplify RT Español and Sputnik Mundo content through additional networks and websites.³²⁷ Moscow likely views these platforms as a “low-cost irritation to the United States” that can garner support for Russian activities around the globe.³²⁸

According to a U.S. official, a lot of leaders throughout the region are increasingly concerned about Russian misinformation campaigns that seek to influence elections in LAC in favor of more pro-Russian candidates.³²⁹ Russia’s adept use of social media platforms to influence elections has been well documented, and there is evidence that Moscow both helps create content in LAC and targets populations there. Around one-third of the Russian Twitter bots spreading misinformation originating from RT and Sputnik during the October 2017 Catalan referendum “were traced to Venezuela, or they self-identified as pro-Chavista.”³³⁰ Social media techniques similar to those used in the U.S. 2016 presidential election have also been observed during political elections in LAC. Initially attributed to domestic actors, events in Venezuela later suggested some election meddling campaigns were accomplished with direct Russian assistance.³³¹

In January 2018, former U.S. national security adviser H. R. McMaster said that the United States had seen “a sophisticated effort to influence the ongoing Mexican presidential campaign.”³³² Reportedly, Mexico’s National Electoral Institute “concluded that 65 percent of the visits to Mexico’s website for voters abroad came from computers located in St. Petersburg, Russia,” and, later in 2018, Russian disinformation targeted a national election in Colombia in addition to around 50,000 cyberattacks on Colombia’s national voter registry.³³³ Compared with populations in other regions, Latin Americans are reportedly avid social media users, “making

³²⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

³²⁶ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³²⁷ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³²⁸ Morgus et al., 2019.

³²⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

³³⁰ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

³³¹ Morgus et al., 2019.

³³² Quoted in David Alire Garcia and Noe Torres, “Russia Meddling in Mexican Election: White House Aide McMaster,” Reuters, January 27, 2018.

³³³ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

them susceptible to potential Russian efforts to promote divisive or anti-U.S. narratives via online platforms.”³³⁴ As one close observer noted, LAC is a heterogeneous and sometimes unstable region that Moscow believes it can opportunistically exploit through a combination of state-run and social media platforms.³³⁵ When combined with Russia’s active support to friendly governments’ development and employment of cyber-attacks, hacking, and surveillance targeting political opponents and journalists,³³⁶ Russia presents a serious threat within the information domain in LAC.

Russia employs two principal instruments for promoting Russian culture and language: the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute and the Russkiy Mir Foundation.³³⁷ Both are subsidized by the Russian government and controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Science. The Pushkin Institute maintains five centers in Latin America (in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela) along with numerous outreach programs to Latin American universities that teach the Russian language and hold cultural events. Russkiy Mir, with eight centers in Latin America (in Cuba, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and Peru) also provides Russian-language training and aims to improve Russia’s image abroad. However, the effectiveness of these cultural and language institutes is questionable, as regional interest in Russian culture remains relatively limited.³³⁸

Arms Sales

Russia has been a major arms supplier in the region for years, and many LAC countries have purchased and are familiar with Soviet weapons and equipment. Combined with the generally lower costs of Russian arms, this provides Russia with an advantage over competitors, and Russian hardware reaches numerous countries in the region.³³⁹ However, about 73 percent of Russia’s regional arms sales in recent years have been with Venezuela, which is highly dependent on Russian (and Chinese) equipment to modernize its armed forces.³⁴⁰ Multiple Russian arms manufacturers have lucrative operations in the region. In the past two decades, the Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport alone sold \$10 billion in ground and air weapons and

³³⁴ Gurganus, 2018.

³³⁵ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

³³⁶ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³³⁷ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021. *Russkiy mir* means *Russian world*.

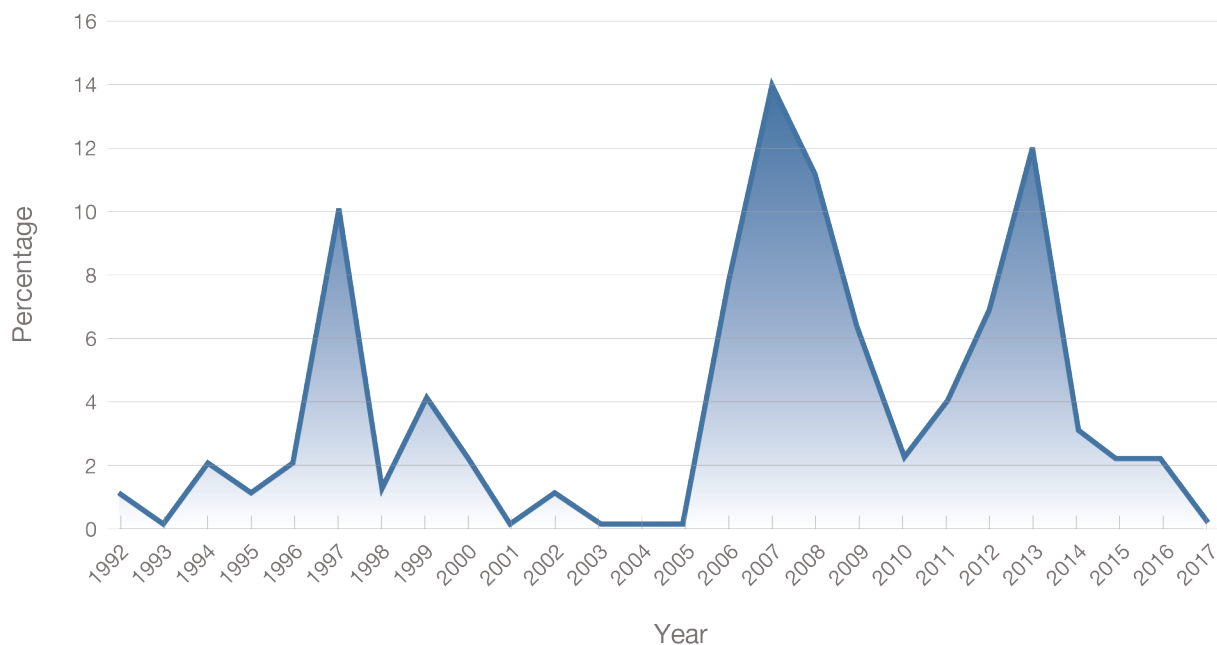
³³⁸ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³³⁹ Gurganus, 2018. Ellis (2017) notes that “Ironically, Russia’s advance in Latin America has been limited by China’s own progress in the region. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has displaced Russia, to some degree, in arms sales to countries such as Peru and Venezuela.”

³⁴⁰ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

equipment to the region.³⁴¹ That said, LAC still represents a relatively small percentage of Russia’s arms exports globally,³⁴² as depicted in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9. Russian Arms Sales to Latin America as Percentage of Worldwide Russian Arms Sales, 1992–2017



SOURCES: Adapted from Rosario and Miles, 2018; SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

Between 2000 and 2017, Russia and the United States on average made up about 20 percent of arms sales to LAC.³⁴³ However, such long-term averages mask year-to-year changes in the relative market shares and absolute values (see Figure 3.10). For example, between 2004 and 2014, the combination of high commodity prices and a wave of leftist governments provided Moscow with an opportunity to position “itself as a willing partner in arms sales and became the leading arms exporter in the region, surpassing China and the United States by far.” After 2014, however, the total value of U.S. arms supplied to the region recovered to exceed that of Russia.³⁴⁴ In fact, since 2014, arms imports to the region have been on the decline overall, as depicted in Figure 3.10, including those from Russia, which dropped to be as low as 0.8 percent of Russia’s total exports.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

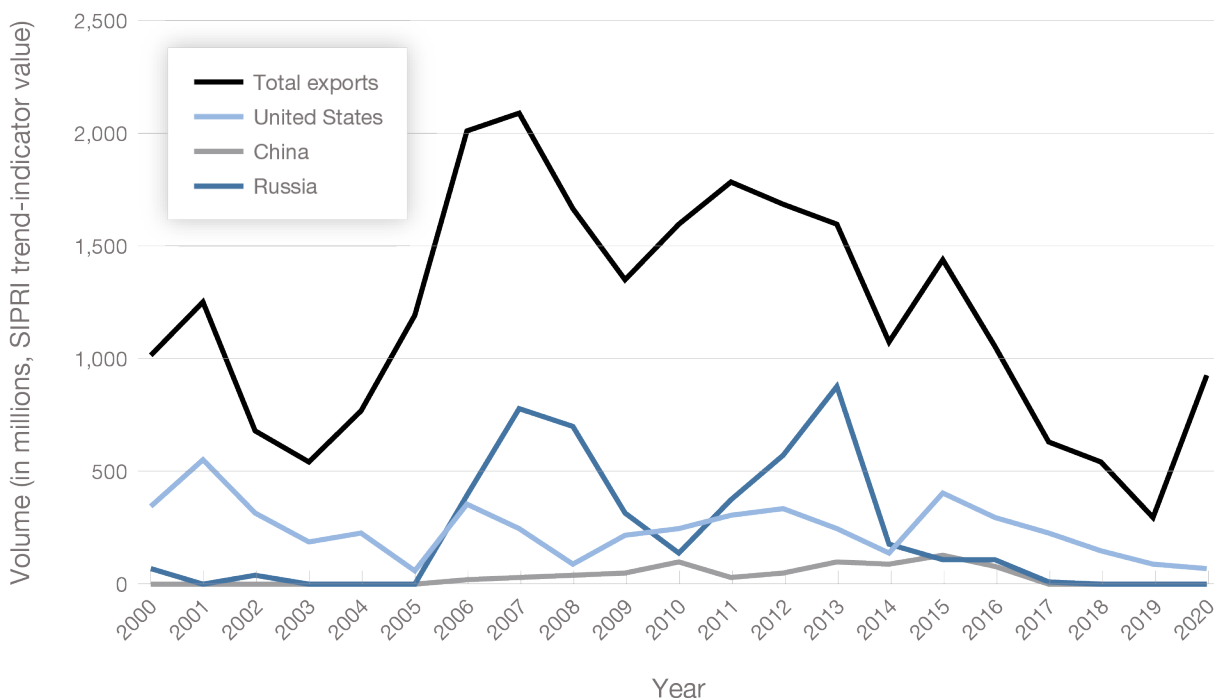
³⁴² Morgus et al., 2019.

³⁴³ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁴⁴ Peter Cavanagh, *Russia Became an Important Arms Supplier for Latin America, but Its Sales Have Dropped*, Universidad de Navarra, 2020.

³⁴⁵ Cavanagh, 2020.

Figure 3.10. Arms Exports to Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2000–2017



SOURCES: Adapted from Julia Gurganus, “Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2018; SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

NOTES: Export volume expressed in millions of trend-indicator value, SIPRI’s common unit for measuring the volume of international arms transfers. Latin American and Caribbean countries for which arms sales data were available are Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

While Moscow is eager to displace U.S. suppliers whenever possible,³⁴⁶ the economic benefits from arms sales are not Russia’s primary motivation. Moscow uses arms sales as an instrument to improve its geopolitical influence and presence. Military weapons, vehicles, and aircraft often require significant maintenance and technical support to sustain their use over time, and commercial sales of Russian equipment create lasting relationships with national governments, with further political (and economic) implications. They also justify the physical presence of Russian military officials, trainers, and technicians in countries with Russian hardware.³⁴⁷ For example, Peru has large quantities of Russian aircraft (military helicopters have been Russia’s most successful product in the region³⁴⁸), which led to the establishment of Russian helicopter maintenance and repair facilities in the country.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁴⁷ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021.

³⁴⁸ Ellis, 2016, p. 10.

³⁴⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

Finally, Russian arms are well represented in Latin American defense expositions, including FIDAE in Chile, the Latin America Air and Defense international trade show in Brazil, and SITDEF in Peru.³⁵⁰ Table 3.2 provides examples of Russian military hardware sold to LAC countries between 2000 and 2020.

Table 3.2. Examples of Russian Arms Sales to Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2000–2020

Country	Equipment
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9M114 anti-tank missiles • Mi-35M combat helicopters • Igla-S portable surface-to-air missiles
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters
Cuba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MiG-29 fighter aircraft
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters • Igla-S portable surface-to-air missiles
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-26 transport helicopters • An-32 transport aircraft • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters • Igla-S portable surface-to-air missiles
Nicaragua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters • BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles • BTR-70 armored personnel carriers • T-72B tanks • An-26 transport aircraft
Peru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Il-103 light aircraft • Mi-24P/Mi-35P combat helicopters • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters
Venezuela	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi-26 transport helicopters • Mi-35M combat helicopters • Mi-8MT/Mi-17 transport helicopters • KAB-500/1500 guided bombs • Kh-29/Kh-31A1/Kh-59ME Ovod anti-ship missiles • R-27R-T/R-73/R-77 beyond-visual-range missile air-to-air missiles • Su-30MK fighter aircraft • Igla-S portable surface-to-air missiles • S-125 Pechora-2M/V-601/9M317/9M82M/9M83M/Buk-M2/S-300VM/SA-23 surface-to-air missiles • Bastion anti-tank missiles • BM-21 Grad 122mm self-propelled multiple rocket launchers • BM-9A52 Smerch self-propelled multiple rocket launchers • BMP-3/BTR-80A infantry fighting vehicles • BREM-1 armored recovery vehicles • T-72M1 tanks • 2B11 120mm mortars

SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “SIPRI Arms Transfer database,” undated, data generated June 25, 2021.

³⁵⁰ Ellis, 2016, p. 13.

Security Cooperation and Access to the Hemisphere

Russia's additional security cooperation in the region is also largely focused on its traditional partners, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. In those countries, bilateral engagements have proven successful in establishing new Russian facilities (mostly as centers for training LAC military members), gaining access to existing regional bases, and making agreements for the resupplying of ships and aircraft.³⁵¹ It appears that Moscow is primarily interested in establishing a physical military presence in LAC that would use existing ports and airfields to position Russian military capabilities closer to the continental United States and send a message to Washington.³⁵²

As discussed previously, the Maduro regime largely owes its continued survival to Russian and Chinese support in the face of U.S. and European arms embargoes and sanctions. In addition to most of Venezuela's military hardware coming from these two countries,³⁵³ Russia provides direct security force assistance, with military troops and military contractors in the country.³⁵⁴ Hundreds of Russian soldiers have reportedly embedded within Venezuelan formations and wear Venezuelan army uniforms to blend in.³⁵⁵ Russian private military companies have been guarding Russian business interests and companies in Venezuela since at least 2017. The contractors, most likely from the infamous Wagner Group, provide personal security for Maduro, are active in the cyber domain, and conduct surveillance.³⁵⁶ In 2019, Russia inaugurated a military helicopter training center in the country to train Venezuelan pilots on Russian aircraft.³⁵⁷ Later that same year, Russian and Venezuelan defense ministers agreed to have each country's warships visit their respective ports and comments were made "about stationing cruise missiles in Venezuela as a response to the U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty."³⁵⁸

Moscow's commitment to Caracas would probably reach its limit in the case of an actual U.S. military intervention, and Putin, some experts say, is unlikely and economically unable to sustain a large-scale military campaign to keep Maduro in power in the same way that Russia did for Bashar al-Assad in Syria.³⁵⁹

Since Ortega returned to power in 2007, Russia has conducted naval exercises in Nicaragua's territorial waters and the Nicaraguan parliament "voted to allow Russian warships to dock in

³⁵¹ Ellis, 2016, p. 5.

³⁵² Gurganus, 2018; Ellis, 2016, p. 4.

³⁵³ Vogel, 2019.

³⁵⁴ Vogel, 2019.

³⁵⁵ Ryan C. Berg, "Russia Is Gearing Up for a Conflict with the United States in the Caribbean," *Foreign Policy*, October 9, 2019.

³⁵⁶ Brian Katz, Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, "Moscow's Mercenary Wars: The Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2020.

³⁵⁷ Vogel, 2019; "Russia Says It Has Opened Helicopter Training Center in Venezuela," Reuters, April 2, 2019.

³⁵⁸ Berg, 2019.

³⁵⁹ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

Nicaraguan ports.”³⁶⁰ Russia also built a police and military training facility in Nicaragua, allegedly under the auspices of providing counternarcotic training to personnel from across Central America.³⁶¹ The training facility (announced in 2013 but officially inaugurated in 2017³⁶²) welcomes students from throughout the region, a marked difference from China’s approach, which has generally been limited to individual personnel exchanges as opposed to developing permanent training centers in the hemisphere.³⁶³

Managua also allowed Russia to build a GLONASS station in Nicaragua.³⁶⁴ Located suspiciously near the U.S. embassy, it has been suggested that sensing equipment at the facility can also be used for espionage operations.³⁶⁵ Moscow’s security engagements with Managua are often accompanied by economic arrangements such as the agreement to allow Russian companies to “construct two ports, an airport, and an oil pipeline, all of which is estimated at a value of US\$40 billion.”³⁶⁶

Cuba represents another key element of Russia’s security cooperation and collaboration in the region. Havana has agreed to provide Russia with military base access including reestablishing a Russian presence at a signals intelligence collection facility not far from the capital.

Other cooperation and access agreements tend to rely more on the leanings of LAC governments and their political affinity to Moscow. For example, in Chile, Michelle Bachelet’s administration (2014–2018) agreed to cooperate with Russia’s navy, and Suriname’s previous leader, Desiré Bouterse, was reportedly considering Russian military cooperation agreements as well.³⁶⁷ Both security relationships are likely to be less reliable for Moscow under subsequent governments in both countries, emphasizing the importance of that factor for Russia in the region.

Economic Activities

Russia does not have significant trade with LAC, especially compared with the United States and China, and nearly half of all its trade is with Brazil and Mexico.³⁶⁸ Other countries with an

³⁶⁰ Gurganus, 2018; Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³⁶¹ Ellis, 2017.

³⁶² Armondo Chaguaceda, “Russia and Nicaragua: Progress in Bilateral Cooperation,” *Global Americans*, March 28, 2019; Wilfredo Miranda Aburto, “Russia Opens Police Training Center in Nicaragua,” *Havana Times*, October 24, 2017.

³⁶³ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

³⁶⁴ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁶⁵ Ellis, 2017.

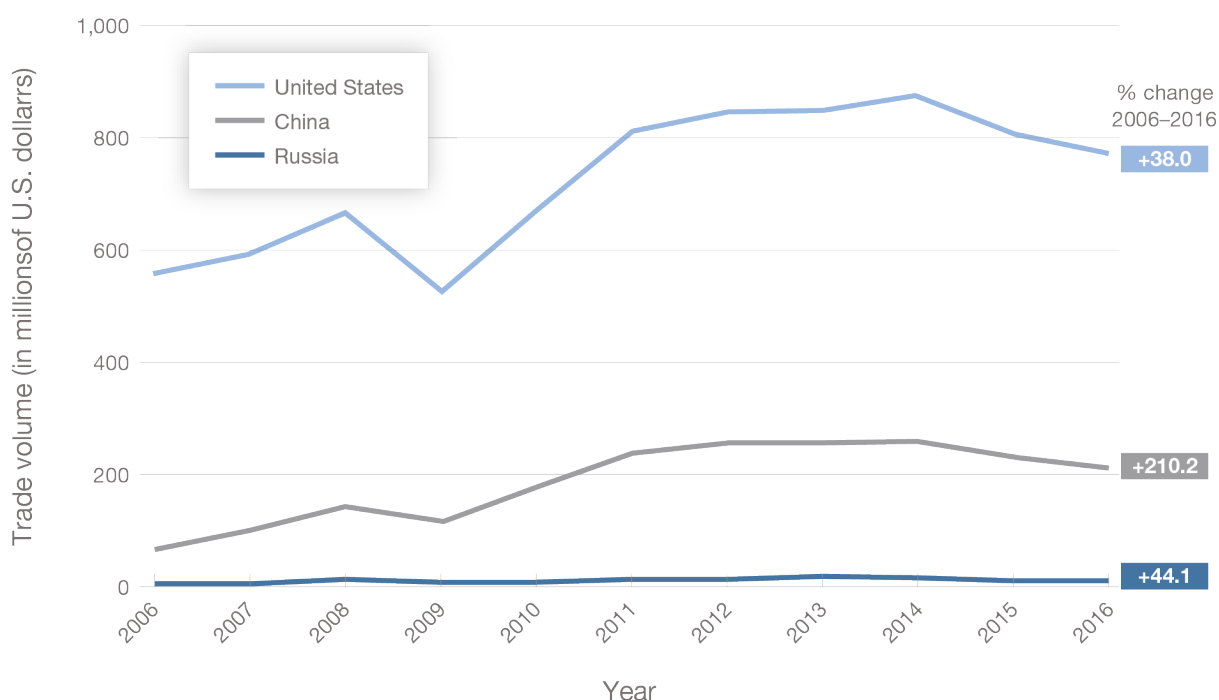
³⁶⁶ de Arimateia da Cruz, 2016, p. 85.

³⁶⁷ Ellis, 2017.

³⁶⁸ Interview with researcher of Russia in Latin American affairs, May 27, 2021. Despite Mexico being Russia’s second-largest trading partner in the region, “Russia’s annual total trade in 2016 with Mexico was equal to the amount Mexico trades with the United States every 36 hours” (Rosario and Miles, 2018).

above-average share of trade with Russia include Ecuador (7.5 percent), Trinidad and Tobago (7.3 percent), Argentina (6.3 percent), Chile (5.7 percent), and Paraguay (5.3 percent).³⁶⁹ Russia primarily pursues bilateral deals and uses state-owned or state-controlled companies for economic engagements in the region. In the context of EU and U.S. sanctions, it is in Moscow's interest to increase commercial and trade relationships in other regions,³⁷⁰ and it has done so in LAC in recent years. Between 2006 and 2016, Russia's trade in the region increased by 44.1 percent, although that is compared with a 38 percent increase in U.S.-LAC trade and more than 200 percent increase in China-LAC trade (see Figure 3.11).³⁷¹

Figure 3.11. Russian, U.S., and Chinese Total Trade with Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2006–2016



SOURCES: Adapted from Gurganus, 2018; UN Comtrade Database data.

NOTE: Latin American and Caribbean countries for which data were available are Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Nearly all of Russia's imports from LAC are food products, especially from Argentina and Brazil, which has been in part to avoid the effects of sanctions by replacing previous European and American suppliers.³⁷² In addition to military equipment, exports to LAC mostly include oil,

³⁶⁹ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³⁷⁰ Gurganus, 2018.

³⁷¹ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020; Gurganus, 2018.

³⁷² Mander, 2015; Christian Oliver, "EU Plans Russia Sanctions Talks with Latin America Countries," *Financial Times*, August 11, 2014.

fertilizers, aluminum, iron, and coal.³⁷³ Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Mexico, and Argentina also have agreements for Russia to provide or support energy production operations.³⁷⁴

Russia's state-owned oil company, Rosneft, has become the top trader of Venezuelan oil as the number of customers willing to work with Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA, has diminished.³⁷⁵ With sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Rosneft facilitates moving its oil into world markets and accepts Venezuelan crude as a form of loan repayment,³⁷⁶ acting as a "spoiler" to counter the effects of U.S. sanctions.³⁷⁷ Rosneft has also accepted 100 percent control of Venezuela's largest gas reserves in exchange for offering billions of dollars in loans to keep Maduro's regime afloat.³⁷⁸ Additionally, Rosneft took a 49 percent stake in U.S.-based Citgo as partial collateral, causing members of Congress to warn of risks to U.S. national security. The company has previously invested heavily in Brazilian oil companies and projects, as well.³⁷⁹ PDVSA moved its European headquarters from Lisbon to Moscow in 2019 and Caracas has instructed oil-related partners to use Russian banks for payments.³⁸⁰ Russia even provided Maduro with assistance in developing a Venezuelan cryptocurrency called the *petro* that would be backed by the value of Venezuelan oil and used to further avoid U.S. sanctions.³⁸¹

Russia has also expressed interest in expanding technological partnerships in the region including those related to nuclear power. For example, investments and technology sharing with Paraguay was agreed to in 2016 under a Pacific nuclear energy partnership, and Russia's state nuclear company, Rosatom, reached a similar agreement with Argentina in 2018 for uranium exploration and nuclear power plant construction assistance.³⁸² Bolivia's previous president, Evo Morales, also agreed to Russian assistance in building a "nuclear center to research radiation technologies applied in agriculture, medicine and various industries."³⁸³

A large portion of Russia's economic activity reportedly includes illicit or hidden transactions—39 percent of its domestic economy, according to one estimate.³⁸⁴ Some Russian criminal networks maintain global operations and connections with Kremlin officials and have

³⁷³ Milosevich-Juaristi, 2020.

³⁷⁴ Morgus et al., 2019.

³⁷⁵ Berg, 2019.

³⁷⁶ Berg, 2019.

³⁷⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

³⁷⁸ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁷⁹ Rosario and Miles, 2018.

³⁸⁰ Diego Moya-Ocampos, "Venezuela Leans on China and Russia as Crisis Intensifies," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Jane's, June 27, 2019.

³⁸¹ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁸² Farah and Babineau, 2019; de Arimateia da Cruz, 2016, pp. 83–84.

³⁸³ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁸⁴ Boon Yew Ng, *Emerging from the Shadows: The Shadow Economy to 2025*, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, June 2017.

been known to use LAC banks for money laundering and illicit activities.³⁸⁵ Some networks are also accused of being actively used as tools of statecraft under the Gerasimov Doctrine that closely follow Russian foreign diplomatic presence. In a 2018 case, for example, Argentine authorities seized approximately 400 kilograms of cocaine found in an annex of the Russian embassy, and the Russian ambassador apparently had a relationship with the head of the criminal network responsible.³⁸⁶ Transnational organized crime groups have also been reported in resource-extraction operations in ungoverned parts of Venezuela.³⁸⁷

Iran in the Western Hemisphere

Compared with China and Russia, Iran has a smaller overall footprint in LAC, a more opaque agenda, and a narrower focus for outreach and engagement. That said, the Islamic Republic has considered Latin America fertile ground for political and religious expansion since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.³⁸⁸

Background

In 1982, Tehran decided to use Iranian embassies and mosques around the world to facilitate proxy terrorist groups with exporting its revolutionary ideology. Iranian cleric Mohsen Rabbani was sent to Argentina under the auspices of being a commercial attaché intending to inspect livestock. However, Rabbani's main focus in LAC was on what he called "a virgin area that unfortunately, till now, its huge potential has not been taken into account by the Islamic people of Iran" and the potential for "solid support against the imperialism and Zionism intrigues."³⁸⁹ The 1980s saw a rise in Iranian intelligence operatives developing intelligence and logistics networks in Latin America alongside members of Iran's proxy Hezbollah.³⁹⁰ Following the 1994 attack against a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires, the U.S. State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism testified to Congress that "Iranian embassies in the region were stacked with larger-than-necessary numbers of diplomats, some of whom were believed to be intelligence agents and terrorist operatives."³⁹¹

In the early 2000s, when Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez championed "21st century socialism," Tehran's formal outreach in Latin America began in earnest. The anti-U.S. ideology

³⁸⁵ Morgus et al., 2019.

³⁸⁶ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁸⁷ Berg, 2019.

³⁸⁸ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Jon B. Perdue, "A Marriage of Radical Ideologies," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 13.

³⁹⁰ Matthew Levitt, *Iran and Hezbollah Remain Hyperactive in Latin America*, Washington Institute, August 11, 2016.

³⁹¹ Levitt, 2016.

taking hold in some places in the hemisphere provided anti-U.S. governments, including Iran, opportunities to diminish U.S. influence in the region.³⁹² Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president between 2005 and 2013, forged strong personal and political ties with Chavez that anchored Iran's official presence in Latin America. Chavez, for his part, granted Iran access to various Venezuelan institutions and facilitated Iran's political outreach to other members of the ALBA alliance.³⁹³ This helped Tehran deepen ties with governments in Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. In general, their common cause was a shared opposition to U.S. foreign policy,³⁹⁴ but Venezuela also became a source of political and material support to Iran's nuclear program and their bilateral economic relations grew.³⁹⁵

Chavez died of cancer in 2013 and was succeeded by Nicolas Maduro, who had managed Venezuela's relationship with Iran as foreign minister and remained sympathetic toward Tehran. However, Maduro also presided over an implosion of the nation's economy and security situation, weakening Venezuela's position as Iran's regional anchor.

While ALBA and the "Bolivarian revolution" it represented had lost its most fervent leader in Chavez, Iran had developed formal relations with other Latin American governments and still maintained political and economic influence in the region overall.³⁹⁶ With the 2013 reelection of Ecuador's Rafael Correa and continued presidency of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, the Bolivarian project continued, and the Iran-ALBA axis remained a strong challenge to the United States in LAC.³⁹⁷ However, the Iranian regime has sought to gain entrance and pursue strategic objectives throughout the entirety of LAC.³⁹⁸

Iran's Goals and Objectives in the Western Hemisphere

LAC may not appear to represent a significant region for current Iranian policy interests. LAC nations are separated from Iran by vast geographical distance and do not share deep historical, cultural, linguistic, or religious ties. Even Iran's closest partners in ALBA compete with the Islamic Republic on the global oil market.³⁹⁹ Characterizations of Iranian activities in LAC often suggest that it primarily seeks to be a spoiler of U.S. policy goals,⁴⁰⁰ but Tehran also

³⁹² Ilan Berman, "What Iran Wants in the Americas," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 2.

³⁹³ Martin Rodil, "A Venezuelan Platform for Iran's Military Ambitions," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 64.

³⁹⁴ Giorgio Cafiero, "Trump fights Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' in Latin America," Atlantic Council, February 28, 2020.

³⁹⁵ Ilan Berman, pp. 2–3.

³⁹⁶ Joseph M. Humire, "Anticipating Iran's Next Moves," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 93–94.

³⁹⁷ Joel Hirst, "The ALBA," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 30.

³⁹⁸ Humire, pp. 96–97.

³⁹⁹ Hirst, 2014, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

sees the region's potential value in the ability to launder sanctioned money, gain geographic proximity to America's homeland,⁴⁰¹ obtain international diplomatic support, and prove to the world that Iran is not an isolated nation.⁴⁰² In this section, we highlight five of Tehran's strategic goals in LAC, as distilled from a review of relevant publications and interviews with Iran SMEs.

Avoid and Mitigate Sanctions

Iran and Hezbollah have been able to exploit drug trafficking and criminal money laundering in Latin America since the 1980s. As Tehran and Caracas developed a strategic partnership, more official and governmental institutions became available to help Iran avoid Western sanctions. Joint financial institutions, shell companies, and lax banking practices ensured that sanctioned individuals and groups in Iran could still access the global economy.⁴⁰³ When the U.S. and European governments imposed sanctions over Iran's nuclear program, Tehran sought to diversify its economic relationships with multiple nations to mitigate the effects of increasing international isolation. Prior to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), sanctioned Iranian funds moved through institutions in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama using various methods.⁴⁰⁴

More recently, Iran uses Venezuela, whose oil industry is also under sanction, to exchange its oil for gold bars to avoid sanctions.⁴⁰⁵ Given that sanctions have been a common tool used by the United States and international community to respond to a wide range of aggressive and illicit Iranian behavior, the ability to avoid or mitigate the effects of sanctions remains one of Tehran's principle strategic objectives in LAC.

Gaining Access to Strategic Natural Resources

Whereas Beijing seeks LAC's oil to support Chinese development, minerals for Chinese industries, and agriculture products for Chinese diets, Iran's appetite for LAC's natural resources are primarily centered around Tehran's nuclear ambitions and missile programs. Strategic materials including uranium, thorium, tantalum, and lithium are found in southeastern Brazil, western Bolivia, and parts of Chile and Peru.⁴⁰⁶ Venezuela's eastern border with Guyana is also rich with uranium, which led Iran to commence mining activities there in the mid-2000s, and Iran has supported prospecting for the same material in eastern Bolivia. Bolivia is also known to have reserves of lithium, important for nuclear weapon development, as well as tantalum and

⁴⁰¹ Rivera, 2019.

⁴⁰² Hirst, 2014, p. 26.

⁴⁰³ Berman, 2014, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ Alex Perez, "Sanctions Busting Schemes in Ecuador," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 51.

⁴⁰⁵ Charles Kennedy, "Venezuela Is Buying Iranian Oil with Planes Full Of Gold," *Oil Price*, September 28, 2020.

⁴⁰⁶ Ivan Witker, "The Southern Cone," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 34.

thorium, which can be utilized in nuclear work and the production of ballistic missiles.⁴⁰⁷ Iran's demand of raw materials for strategic weapons of these kinds may fluctuate with the status of international arms agreements and sanctions, but whenever developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is a policy priority, Tehran will likely want access to these rare natural resources in Latin America.

Financing and Supporting Proxy Terrorist Groups

The Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, referred to as a classic "terrorist safe haven" and "the United Nations of crime," has been a very suitable hub for Hezbollah operatives to develop financial and logistical networks within the Shi'a and Lebanese diaspora communities in the region.⁴⁰⁸ The TBA has been referred to as "Hezbollah's most important base outside of Lebanon."⁴⁰⁹ Since the 1980s, Hezbollah's fundraising, illicit businesses, and smuggling activities have expanded beyond the TBA, and there are reasons to believe that terrorist operational planning is conducted elsewhere in the hemisphere, as well.⁴¹⁰ And, as SOUTHCOM commander Faller reported to Congress, "There are active connections between Iranian regime and Lebanese Hezbollah fundraising activities throughout the region."⁴¹¹

A new TBA at the intersection of Chile, Bolivia, and Peru has recently emerged as an additional area for groups such as Hezbollah and criminal networks to develop logistics networks.⁴¹² The Kalacha region of Bolivia, for example, has reportedly been used as a base of operations for Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations, in addition to organized crime and the drug trade.⁴¹³ Supporting proxy groups in the region is likely to remain a policy objective for Tehran.

Expanding Operational Reach Toward the United States

Whether through Iranian military and intelligence personnel or proxies such as Hezbollah, Iran's presence and access to the Western Hemisphere provides Tehran with strategic positions from which to facilitate attacks against the U.S. homeland. As Director of National Intelligence General James Clapper stated in 2013, "Iran may be more willing to seize opportunities to attack in the United States in response to perceived offenses against the regime,"⁴¹⁴ given its sanctuary

⁴⁰⁷ Berman, 2014, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁰⁸ Levitt, 2016.

⁴⁰⁹ Rivera, 2019.

⁴¹⁰ Levitt, 2016.

⁴¹¹ Abraham Mahshie, "Terror in South America: Iran and Hezbollah Threaten the Region, Insiders Say," *Washington Examiner*, February 21, 2020.

⁴¹² Witker, 2014, p. 34.

⁴¹³ Sandra Warmouth, "Iran's Expanding Footprint in Latin America," *Small Wars Journal*, May 29, 2012.

⁴¹⁴ Quoted in Rodil, 2014, pp. 67–68.

and freedom of movement in Venezuela. Tehran's consideration for ordering proxy strikes on U.S. soil or regional interests has probably risen with U.S.-Iran tensions.⁴¹⁵

A thwarted attempt to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, D.C., cyber-hacking attempts in Mexico and Miami, and the presence of Iranian-connected terrorists (later arrested) in Mexico are examples of the Islamic Republic's willingness to operationalize the advantage of their geographic access in LAC. If a larger political crisis or military conflict were to threaten the Iranian regime, Tehran may want to call on response options in the Western Hemisphere.⁴¹⁶ Further, Iran is not intent on relying on Venezuela as its sole point of penetration to the region for these purposes. An Argentine prosecutor provided warnings of Iranian infiltration to the authorities of Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Colombia.⁴¹⁷ Successful penetration into any of these would help expand Iran's military, intelligence, and terrorist operational reach toward the United States.

Spreading Islamic and Anti-U.S. Ideologies

Mohsen Rabbani, the "cultural attaché" sent to Argentina in the 1980s, did more than mastermind terror attacks in the 1990s. He also began a network of "informal ambassadors" that spread throughout the region to proselytize Islam.⁴¹⁸ The greatest opportunity for ideological influence has been in Argentina and Brazil, which contain the largest Muslim populations in the region.⁴¹⁹

However, Tehran's ideological objectives in the hemisphere go beyond religion. When the Soviet Union fell in 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini considered the Iranian revolution to be the "natural successor to Soviet Communism" that could "easily fill up the ideological vacuum" left at the end of the Cold War.⁴²⁰ Similar offers have been made to Latin American leaders who share an antipathy toward Western powers in the years since suggesting, "The leadership of the downtrodden has passed to our Islamic Republic. Those who wish to destroy America must understand this reality."⁴²¹ Iran's ayatollahs likely still seek opportunities to fill an anti-U.S. and anti-Western niche in parts of LAC that would welcome such an ideology.

Iran's Approach: Investments, Programs, and Partnerships

Tehran's objectives in the Western hemisphere are largely driven by conditions external to the region, including its other international relationships, vis-à-vis American foreign policy

⁴¹⁵ Mahshie, 2020.

⁴¹⁶ Hirst, 2014, p. 27.

⁴¹⁷ Levitt, 2016.

⁴¹⁸ Berman, 2014, p. 3.

⁴¹⁹ Witker, 2014, p. 34.

⁴²⁰ Perdue, 2014, p. 12.

⁴²¹ Perdue, 2014, p. 12.

specifically, along with the presence of financial sanctions. Iranian activities and relationships in LAC are also heavily subject to changes in regional governments with which Tehran seeks to develop and expand lasting alliances, and the loss and subsequent return of strong allies in Argentina and Bolivia in recent years were clear indications of Iran's fragile presence outside Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. However, Iranian activities in LAC are often aligned with Moscow's agenda, and Russia's presence in the region complements Iran's, most obviously in keeping the Maduro regime afloat and in the information domain, a particularly concerning dynamic.⁴²²

Iran views itself as a global player and a premier historical civilization that deserves a global presence. As the United States and other great powers, except for China, have diverted their focus elsewhere, Iran still sees some opportunities in LAC: opportunities to cultivate a bloc of countries not aligned with the United States, opportunities to legitimize Tehran's anti-West narratives at home and abroad,⁴²³ and opportunities to exploit poor governance and ungoverned spaces to advance its national objectives. In the following sections, we describe some of the ways Iran has gone about taking advantage of these opportunities.

Using Anti-U.S. Governments and Groups as Political Gateways to the Region

Iran has historically relied on select relationships as catalysts for greater regional engagements and influence. In 2020, Iran shipped several oil tankers to mitigate Caracas's oil shortages due to sanctions and provide military aid to the Maduro regime.⁴²⁴ Tehran has sent military trainers, drones, and parts to restart dilapidated refineries to Venezuela. Reportedly, around \$500 million in gold bullion was flown back to Iran as payment. Further, "hundreds of Lebanese and Syrians, allegedly including Hezbollah operatives, received Venezuelan residency documents that allowed them to travel freely throughout Latin America." Tehran probably still views Caracas as a pivotal link to reviving Iranian influence in the region.⁴²⁵

Member states of the Venezuelan-driven ALBA bloc have also served as Tehran's gateways to the region for years. Especially after Chavez died in 2013, Iran expanded its ties to these other governments willing to partner with the Islamic Republic. One of the first places they looked to was Bolivia, which provides Iran with greater access to the Southern Cone region, an area that can help Iran achieve a number of its strategic objectives.⁴²⁶ As an indicator of Iranian political ties in the region, several groups were quick to condemn the U.S. strikes in Iraq that killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani in January 2020. These groups included the dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela, members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

⁴²² Farah and Tavarez, 2021.

⁴²³ Interview with an Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴²⁴ Lindsay Gabow, "What Is Iran Up to in Latin America?" *Defense Post*, September 8, 2020.

⁴²⁵ Stephen Johnson, "Iran Is Working Hard to Revive Anti-U.S. Operations in Latin America," *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2020.

⁴²⁶ Witker, 2014, p. 33.

(FARC), and Iranian proxy networks in Brazil, Peru, Argentina, El Salvador, and Mexico.⁴²⁷ ALBA also encouraged both Iran and Syria to be included as official observer states in the political bloc, making ALBA one of Iran's most important strategic allies.

As Iran strengthened ties with ALBA, it was also able to increase its diplomatic presence, opening six new embassies across the region (for a total of 11).⁴²⁸ Figure 3.12 portrays Iran's official diplomatic reach in the region today. This technique was emphasized more during the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad era than it has been in recent years, and no new diplomatic postings have been established since 2010. However, with the recent election of the more conservative Ebrahim Raisi to president in Iran, this direction may shift again.⁴²⁹

Disseminate Anti-U.S. and Anti-Israel Narratives

Iranian messaging in the region is sometimes oriented to the large and growing Muslim population in LAC. (One estimate suggested that nearly 3 million Muslims lived in LAC in 2015, a 23-percent increase since 2010.⁴³⁰) Other times, Iran has sought to influence various non-Islamic groups with anti-imperialist, Bolivarian, and anti-U.S. narratives.⁴³¹ Leftist regimes and authoritarian rulers often hold similar views of the United States as an imperialist power.⁴³² Tehran has long cultivated an image of itself “as a formidable challenger to the United States” and a “vanguard of an axis of resistance” that includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis in Yemen.⁴³³ Iran uses its relationships with like-minded regimes and its investments in the information domain to “replicate this axis of resistance in the Western Hemisphere.”⁴³⁴

Anti-Semitism has also been an ideology that Iran has found an audience for in LAC, particularly while Chavez cooperated with Islamic extremists and showed open hostilities toward the United States, Israel, and Venezuela's own Jewish community. Chavez reportedly paid for posters to be printed of himself with Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, with a quote from Nasrallah proclaiming “our coalition from Gaza to Beirut, to Damascus, to Tehran, and with our brother Chavez.” Chavez's anti-Semitic rhetoric reached a level of potentially inciting violence, convincing about half of Venezuela's Jewish population to emigrate out of the country, and Maduro has promised to continue to fight against the “repressive state of Israel.”⁴³⁵

⁴²⁷ Mary Anastasia O'Grady, “Soleimani's Latin America Terror,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 13, 2020.

⁴²⁸ Hirst, 2014, p. 26.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴³⁰ Rivera, 2019.

⁴³¹ Berg and Clarke, 2020.

⁴³² Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁴³³ Gabow, 2020.

⁴³⁴ Gabow, 2020.

⁴³⁵ Perdue, 2014, pp. 15–18.

Figure 3.12. Iranian Diplomatic Posts in Latin American and Caribbean Countries



SOURCES: See Appendix G.

The two major prongs of Iran’s approach to public messaging include Iranian-sponsored media networks and cultural or religious centers that market Iran’s brand of Shi’a Islam.⁴³⁶ Tehran has invested heavily in Spanish- and English-language television channels and websites to disseminate its narratives to the public.⁴³⁷ In early 2012, Iran launched HispanTV, a station funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Company (IRIB), with the official goal of expanding Iran’s “ideological legitimacy” and diminishing the influence of “dominance seekers,” a reference to the United States. The station was initially accessible in 14 LAC countries and could be viewed via cable and the internet.⁴³⁸ Broadcasting 24 hours a day, HispanTV was modeled after Iran’s English-language PressTV channel to circulate Iranian Shi’ite Islamic propaganda and other state-approved content that primarily denigrates the United States.⁴³⁹ According to the Anti-Defamation League, the station has been “increasing its influence in Latin America” and “has been a strong feature of the Iranian government’s foreign policy in the past decade, and HispanTV serves as a platform to spread Tehran’s conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism.”⁴⁴⁰ In 2013, YouTube disabled HispanTV’s live-stream broadcasting because of anti-Semitic material.⁴⁴¹ Still, the station reaches millions of Spanish-speaking people.⁴⁴² Further, HispanTV shares messaging narratives and sometimes duplicates stories verbatim with RT Español (Russian state media) and teleSUR (Venezuelan state media).⁴⁴³

Iran also employs cultural and religious institutions to spread its ideology and influence populations in LAC. The Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) has the official mission to “strengthen ties with countries and populations overseas through educational, religious, and artistic events and exhibitions.” However, the ICRO reports directly to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and maintains upward of 100 cultural centers in Latin America that wield influence over Shi’a communities and attempts to inspire conversion.⁴⁴⁴ These cultural centers and mosques are a legacy of Mohsen Rabbani, the Iranian intelligence operative who worked with Hezbollah to carry out the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires.⁴⁴⁵ In 2013, the *New York Times* reported on a slain Argentine prosecutor’s indictment, “outlining how Iran had

⁴³⁶ Interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴³⁷ Rivera, 2019.

⁴³⁸ Berman, 2014, p. 3.

⁴³⁹ Warmouth, 2012; Johnson, 2020.

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted in Rivera, 2019.

⁴⁴¹ Rivera, 2019.

⁴⁴² Hirst, 2014, p. 26.

⁴⁴³ Farah and Tavarez, 2021.

⁴⁴⁴ Gabow, 2020.

⁴⁴⁵ Levitt, 2016; Witker, 2014, p. 36; Julian M. Obiglio and Diego C. Naveira, “Rewriting History in Argentina,” in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran’s Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 88.

penetrated not just Argentina, but also Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Guyana, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname, and how it used mosques, social service organizations and its own embassies to radicalize and recruit terrorists.”⁴⁴⁶ Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence is reportedly the lead for establishing cultural centers to “spread propaganda, proselytize, radicalize converts and recruit locals as spies.”⁴⁴⁷

Allies within the ALBA bloc have provided the most fertile ground to expand the presence of Shi’a Islamist cultural centers, giving Iranian agents access to radical populist groups that share a similar anti-American agenda.⁴⁴⁸ Iranian government cells disguise themselves as cultural centers, charitable associations, and religious groups staffed with individuals that undergo training in Iran. Operating below the radar of the governments where they are located, they are free to preach radical Islam, anti-Zionism, and the destruction of Western culture.⁴⁴⁹ Additionally, Tehran perceives itself in a direct Sunni-Shi’a competition with other Muslim states. Thus, a strong anti-Wahhabism narrative is also a component of Iran’s messaging efforts, one that is often overlooked by American observers because the United States does not have an outwardly religious element to its foreign policy.⁴⁵⁰

These informal networks are substantial and an incremental increase in converts to Shi’a Islam has been recorded in places like Chile, but it is not clear how productive these efforts have actually been.⁴⁵¹ Particularly as the ALBA alliance has weakened and Iran’s standing in the region has somewhat diminished,⁴⁵² some observers suggest that Iran’s cultural and religious centers have thus far “failed to inspire significant conversions to Shiite Islam or a groundswell of support for Iran.”⁴⁵³ Still, they represent a large part of Iran’s outreach in the region and relatively cheap and low risk technique for disseminating Tehran’s narratives.

Supporting State-Sponsored Terror Groups

Iran sponsors Lebanese Hezbollah networks in LAC and supports their activities, including caching weapons and raising funds, often via charitable donations, remittances, and through illicit means, such as drug trafficking and money laundering.⁴⁵⁴ Latin America has the highest amount of money laundering activity in the world, making the multitude of laundering schemes

⁴⁴⁶ Rivera, 2019.

⁴⁴⁷ O’Grady, 2020.

⁴⁴⁸ Farah and Babineau, 2019; interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴⁴⁹ Leonardo Coutinho, “Iran and Islamic Extremism in Brazil,” in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran’s Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 47.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴⁵¹ Witker, 2014, p. 35.

⁴⁵² Farah and Babineau, 2019.

⁴⁵³ Johnson, 2020.

⁴⁵⁴ Faller, 2020.

opportunities for Iran and terror proxy groups to access international financial systems that they would otherwise be denied.⁴⁵⁵

Despite well-known Hezbollah activities in the region, there is debate over how much influence Hezbollah actually maintains in LAC. The group is officially banned in Argentina, Colombia, Honduras, and Guatemala,⁴⁵⁶ and some experts suggest Iranian-directed activity of Hezbollah in the Western Hemisphere has been exaggerated in the past.⁴⁵⁷ Further, some believe that concerns of Hezbollah posing a grave threat to regional security are overstated; while there may be members of the Lebanese Shi'a diaspora that smuggle drugs across South America's open borders, they may not actually have strong ties to the Lebanese Hezbollah organization.⁴⁵⁸ Other experts suggest Hezbollah lacks an organized structure in the region and is limited to "small-time drug smuggling or money-laundering."⁴⁵⁹

Even if individuals of the Lebanese diaspora in LAC are not active members of Hezbollah, they present a source of fundraising and Hezbollah sympathizers.⁴⁶⁰ In this fashion, "Hezbollah's modus operandi in the TBA is a miniature version of what it does in Lebanon to control and co-opt the Shi'a population."⁴⁶¹ The U.S. Treasury Department has also designated a group of Hezbollah members in the TBA as key figures in procuring false Brazilian and Paraguayan identification documents and assisting individuals with illegally obtaining Brazilian citizenship.⁴⁶²

Iran has not been limited to its traditional Hezbollah strongholds or the ten member states of ALBA to support terrorist activities either. The 2007 attempted attack on John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York was reportedly conducted through Guyana. Additionally, senior Iranian officials operating in Mexico were accused of funding the failed 2011 attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, D.C.⁴⁶³ Criminal and terrorist groups also maintain freedom of movement and avoid international sanctions and law enforcement in the TBAs because of corrupt local officials and thriving gray and black markets.⁴⁶⁴ Paraguay's weak tax laws also make that country easier for cartels to launder money.⁴⁶⁵ In the 2010s, Hezbollah maintained its TBA revenue sources, and they probably took on even greater importance to the

⁴⁵⁵ Perez, 2014, p. 59

⁴⁵⁶ "Israel FM Urges Latin American Countries to Ban Hezbollah," *Middle East Monitor*, August 6, 2020.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021; Kate Linthicum, "Could Iran—and Hezbollah—Strike in Latin America?" *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2020.

⁴⁵⁸ Cafiero, 2020.

⁴⁵⁹ "Israel FM Urges Latin American Countries to Ban Hezbollah," 2020.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁴⁶¹ "Israel FM Urges Latin American Countries to Ban Hezbollah," 2020.

⁴⁶² Levitt, 2016.

⁴⁶³ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

⁴⁶⁴ Rivera, 2019.

⁴⁶⁵ Rivera, 2019.

group as Western sanctions and the costs of supporting Bashar al-Assad in Syria's civil war redirected funds from Tehran away from LAC operations.⁴⁶⁶ A Drug Enforcement Administration investigation revealed hundreds of millions of dollars being laundered through a global Hezbollah operation, some of which likely funded Hezbollah's purchase of arms for the conflict in Syria and the financing of Hezbollah's terrorist wing, the External Security Organization, also referred to as the Islamic Jihad Organization.⁴⁶⁷

In 2018, Argentina's Financial Information Unit froze assets belonging to the Clan Barakat group for illicit activities, including financing terrorism; attempts by the group to launder \$10 million through a casino in Iguazu, Argentina, were still detected later that year.⁴⁶⁸ Argentina became the first Latin American country to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in July 2019, followed shortly by the Mario Abdo Benitez administration in Paraguay as concerns about Hezbollah activities in the region remained.⁴⁶⁹

Outside of the TBA, Hezbollah has also maintained a presence in Venezuela for years, even before Chavez's rule began in 1999. Chavez deliberately suspended any surveillance of the group's activities,⁴⁷⁰ and Maduro has continued enabling illicit financial activities and sustained a "permissive environment for known terrorist groups."⁴⁷¹ Venezuela's Margarita Island is thought to have been a "significant base of operations for Iranian and Iranian-linked militants thanks to its permissive environment and lax oversight."⁴⁷² A number of ALBA member countries also still generally present a relatively permissive operating environment for additional terrorist organizations, including the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) Basque separatist group, Shining Path, and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).⁴⁷³

Another area with porous borders that Iran and its proxies have begun taking advantage of is the "Pacific TBA," a stateless tri-border area between northern Chile (Arica and Iquique), southern Peru (Tacna and Puno), and Bolivia (from El Alto to the Iranian embassy in La Paz). The Pacific TBA provides clandestine routes from landlocked Bolivia to seaports in Chile, helping Iranian agents connect to new and existing criminal, terrorist, and logistical networks throughout the region, including expanding further into the Southern Cone.⁴⁷⁴ The lax border controls between Chile and Bolivia present a particular concern. Free trade zones in Chilean

⁴⁶⁶ Coutinho, 2014, p. 43.

⁴⁶⁷ Levitt, 2016.

⁴⁶⁸ Sarah Nielsen, "Fighting Terror in the Tri-Border Area: Q&A with Alison August Treppel, Executive Secretary of the Organization of American States's Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE)," Wilson Center, December 9, 2019.

⁴⁶⁹ Nielsen 2019; Cassandra Garrison, "Argentina Brands Hezbollah Terrorist Organization, Freezes Assets," Reuters, July 18, 2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Mahshie, 2020.

⁴⁷¹ Berg and Clarke, 2020.

⁴⁷² Hirst, 2014, p. 27.

⁴⁷³ Hirst, 2014, p. 27.

⁴⁷⁴ Witker, 2014, p. 39.

seaports are historic transit points for drugs, funds, and other illicit products used by Hezbollah operatives providing shipping routes between Bolivia and Iran.⁴⁷⁵

Security- and Defense-Related Engagements

Iran's ability to penetrate LAC countries with an official military and security presence is relatively limited. The Chavez-Ahmadinejad relationship opened the door to Venezuela and later, through ALBA, to Bolivia. Since 2004, operatives of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF) have been known to be present in several regional embassies and Iran began developing a network of military installations in Venezuela. For example, in the early 2010s an Iranian-Venezuelan military facility on the peninsula of Paraguana was constructed with the intent of housing deployed Iranian Shahab 3, Scud-B, and Scud-C missiles, and mobile launchers, and for the joint development of intermediate-range ballistic missiles.⁴⁷⁶

The IRGC-QF also assisted Chavez's adoption of "asymmetric warfare" as the nation's guiding military doctrine, which "explicitly endorses acts of terrorism in the event of an American attack."⁴⁷⁷ The National Armed Forces of Venezuela (FAN) also distributed 30,000 copies of a manual based on the Spanish ideologue Jorge Verstrynge's *Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam*. Additionally, Venezuela legalized civilian militias known as *colectivos* modeled after Iran's Basij Resistance Force, an auxiliary force of paramilitary volunteers operated under the IRGC in Iran.⁴⁷⁸ As conditions worsened in 2019, it was to the *colectivos* that Maduro turned to quash discontent and violently maintain social order, making *colectivos* the most-feared group in Venezuela.⁴⁷⁹ In 2020, SOUTHCOM commander Faller noted the "alarming and concerning" presence of IRGC-QF operatives in Venezuela supporting Maduro's hold on power.⁴⁸⁰ Oil and arms shipments from Iran were said to have increased that year as well.⁴⁸¹

Venezuela has also served as a regional hub for Iranian intelligence officials. One investigative report described the relationship a decade ago as a joint intelligence program in which Caracas has agreed "to provide systematic help to Iran with intelligence infrastructure such as arms, identification documents, bank accounts and pipelines for moving operatives and equipment between Iran and Latin America."⁴⁸² As a consequence, between 2009 and 2011 a

⁴⁷⁵ Witker, 2014, p. 34.

⁴⁷⁶ Warmouth, 2012.

⁴⁷⁷ "Brothers in Arms?" *The Economist*, January 14, 2012.

⁴⁷⁸ Adrian Oliva, "A Bolivian Base for Iran's Military Advisors," in Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁷⁹ Luke Taylor, "Maduro Turns to Violent 'Mercenary' Colectivos to Maintain Order," *The World*, April 25, 2019.

⁴⁸⁰ Faller, 2020.

⁴⁸¹ Michael R. Gordon and Ian Talley, "Iran Arms Bolster Maduro, U.S. Says," *Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2020.

⁴⁸² Rodil, 2014, p. 67.

sharp increase was detected in Iranian migrants traveling north through the Western Hemisphere, primarily to Canada. Despite minimal trade ties or shared cultural identity with LAC countries, Iran employs a corps of veteran diplomats with highly proficient Spanish-language skills and vast experience in the region. These “diplomats” are responsible for a wide range of Iranian intelligence activities and have ties to networks previously established by Rabbani.⁴⁸³

Iran has also found Venezuela to be a prominent partner in its military industrial and commercial activities. The Iran Marine Industrial Company (SADRA) maintained offices in Tehran, Caracas, and Puerto Cabello (the main commercial port and base of the Venezuelan Navy). SADRA helped develop Venezuela’s naval infrastructure and in doing so generated funds for the IRGC. Iran’s Parchin Chemical Industries (PCI), in collaboration with Venezuela’s state-owned weapons manufacturer, CAVIM, constructed factories in the city of Moron to produce ingredients for explosives and propellants. CAVIM also partnered with the Iranian Qods Aviation company (sanctioned by the UN Security Council for its involvement in Iranian ballistic missile and nuclear programs) in the town of Maracay to produce unmanned aerial vehicles.⁴⁸⁴

American and European companies do not sell Tehran weapons or related technology, which has incentivized Iran to develop its own robust military-industrial complex. Maintaining military commercial relationships with countries such as Venezuela helps financially support those Iranian defense industries.⁴⁸⁵ More recently, a 2020 visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was timed around the expiration of a UN arms embargo against Iran and Maduro announcing a new “Military, Scientific and Technological Council,” which Maduro said would bring the “best minds” of the Venezuelan military to cooperate on military science and technology with Iran, Russia, China, and Cuba.⁴⁸⁶

In 2012, Iran and Bolivia, under President Evo Morales, signed a bilateral security agreement under the pretext of combatting drug trafficking that justified a robust Iranian military presence in Bolivia. An Iranian train-and-advise mission followed.⁴⁸⁷ Iranian equipment and training for technical and support staff was provided to Bolivian police and army personnel.⁴⁸⁸ That security agreement came shortly after the decision to create an ALBA regional defense school in the town of Warnes, Bolivia, partially funded by Iran. The intention was to provide ALBA countries with an integrated school for military training and professional development and counter U.S. military

⁴⁸³ Farah and Tavarez, 2021.

⁴⁸⁴ Rodil, 2014, pp. 65–67.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Iran SME, May 11, 2021.

⁴⁸⁶ Farah and Tavarez, 2021.

⁴⁸⁷ Oliva, 2014, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁸⁸ Witker, 2014, p. 38.

presence in Latin America.⁴⁸⁹ Iran’s defense minister was present for the school’s inauguration in 2011, although the school was slow to reach full operational status.⁴⁹⁰

In 2016, Morales reopened the ALBA regional defense school to “build an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist thought that links the Armed Forces with social movements and thus counteract the influence of the School of the Americas (from the United States) that has always seen indigenous people as internal enemies.”⁴⁹¹ Following Morales’s resignation in 2019, the interim government repurposed the school,⁴⁹² stating that its original anti-imperialist orientation was no longer conducive with Bolivia’s military doctrine,⁴⁹³ part of the caretaker government’s broader cutting of diplomatic ties with Tehran. While the future nature of this defense school is questionable, these shifts highlight Iran’s reliance on friendly governments to maintain official influence in the region’s security and defense sectors. For example, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif returned for the 2020 inauguration of Bolivia’s newly elected President Luis Arce, a strong ally of Maduro and protégé of Morales,⁴⁹⁴ representing a more willing partner for Tehran—in a country in which the United States does not even maintain a Security Cooperation Office.⁴⁹⁵

While serving as president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad increased the presence of IRGC-QF and other security officials in other parts of LAC. In Ecuador, Iran provided training and equipment to the Ecuadorean intelligence services. At the same time, President Correa sought a closer relationship with Tehran including agreements to finance power plants, small business investments, and bilateral trade.⁴⁹⁶ The presence of IRGC-QF operatives was also increased in Nicaragua, from which they gradually penetrated other parts of Central America, including Panama. Those actions were also complemented with promises of Iranian-funded construction projects.⁴⁹⁷ Many of these activities were likely highly dependent on the personalities of the countries’ respective leaders at the time and could shift in the future, with Ecuador’s recent signing-in of President Guillermo Lasso, for example. However, this dynamic works both ways. A *Wall Street Journal* report in 2020 suggested that Iranian officials have also been developing closer ties with Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁸⁹ Oliva, 2014, p. 73.

⁴⁹⁰ Oliva, 2014, p. 71.

⁴⁹¹ “El Gobierno de Bolivia cerró la escuela militar antiimperialista creada por Evo Morales,” Infobae, January 18, 2020.

⁴⁹² Johnson, 2020.

⁴⁹³ “El Gobierno de Bolivia cerró la escuela militar antiimperialista creada por Evo Morales,” 2020.

⁴⁹⁴ Farah and Tavarez, 2021.

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁴⁹⁶ Warmouth, 2012.

⁴⁹⁷ Warmouth, 2012.

⁴⁹⁸ O’Grady, 2020.

Trade and Sanctions Avoidance

Iranian trade relations in the region have largely depended on Tehran's external political interests and shifts in LAC government leadership over the past two decades. They have included a heavy reliance on oil diplomacy and the connections Ahmadinejad made with Venezuela, followed with other ALBA countries, and the quest for non-oil strategic natural resources.⁴⁹⁹ Official trade in the region remains minor, but Iran has also used its relationships, petrochemical deals, and regional financial institutions to avoid U.S. and international sanctions for years, and this may be Tehran's most significant economic interest in the region.

Compared with the United States and China, Iran has relatively little to offer LAC economies, as shown by its virtually nonexistent official trade ties in the region. Brazil is Iran's largest trading partner in the region, but Iran has little relevance to the Brazilian economy,⁵⁰⁰ and the trade relationship substantially favors Brazil.⁵⁰¹ Trade reportedly escalated rapidly in 2018, with Iran's non-oil trade exports to the region reaching about \$500 million and imports from LAC at \$511 million, a 37.3 percent increase from 2017. Trade supposedly increased again in 2019, still primarily to Brazil followed by Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Venezuela.⁵⁰² However, Iranian trade data post-2017 is unreliable and difficult to verify with high confidence.

Natural resources have constituted an important component of Iran's economic activities and bilateral agreements in the region, particularly in Bolivia. Agreements have been reached with La Paz for lithium exploration and exploitation along with oil, petrochemical, and gas projects. In return, Tehran agreed to a joint venture to build a nuclear power plant in Bolivia.⁵⁰³ As one of the most resource-rich countries in LAC, Bolivia has been on Iran's radar for some time as an opportunity to obtain strategic resources to advance its missile and nuclear programs, potentially even providing the Islamic Republic with uranium ore.⁵⁰⁴ Tehran also agreed to transfer nanotechnology with nuclear uses to Bolivia in return for lithium along with support at the UN.⁵⁰⁵ Accusations of Hezbollah exploiting gold mines and other natural resources from Venezuela have also been made, prompting the United States to sanction Venezuela's state-owned airline for trafficking gold out of the country, in addition to weapons and people.⁵⁰⁶

Other than moving gold out of Venezuela, Iran employs two primary techniques in attempts to avoid U.S. and international sanctions: oil sales and moving money through international

⁴⁹⁹ Renny Castaneda, "Iran's Trade and Investment Nexus in Latin America," TRENDS Research and Advisory, October 29, 2020.

⁵⁰⁰ Coutinho, 2014, p. 44.

⁵⁰¹ Castaneda, 2020.

⁵⁰² Castaneda, 2020.

⁵⁰³ Warmouth, 2012.

⁵⁰⁴ Witker, 2014, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁰⁵ O'Grady, 2020.

⁵⁰⁶ Berg and Clarke, 2020.

currency markets.⁵⁰⁷ In 2007, Iran’s Export Development Bank established a subsidiary in Caracas, after which the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned the bank and PDVSA, Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, for exporting refined products to Iran.⁵⁰⁸ IRGC operatives in Venezuela established front companies to channel funds to PDVSA, which then laundered money through the local economy and eventually into the international financial system.⁵⁰⁹ Sanctions emplaced on both Iran and Venezuela during the Trump administration incentivized the two countries to strengthen these ties further, with Iran providing fuel to the Maduro regime and Venezuelan oil going to Iran to be sold on the black market. Analysts say that these trades continue, despite some U.S. successes at disrupting transfers.⁵¹⁰ In August 2020, for example, the United States interdicted and seized more than 1.1 million barrels of Iranian fuel headed to Venezuela in an attempt to evade U.S. sanctions.⁵¹¹

Iran’s initial attempts to evade sanctions through LAC financial institutions began in the late 2000s with the establishment of the Banco Internacional de Desarrollo C.A. (BID) in Venezuela. Additional BID affiliates were set up in Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador to broaden the range of banks to move money through. Sanctions on BID in Venezuela, in addition to sanctions against Venezuela’s defense industry, halted these attempts, and Tehran shifted to using banks in Ecuador.⁵¹² Ecuadorian banks managed loans to develop an oil refinery and other petrochemical facilities that circumvented U.S., European, and UN sanctions.⁵¹³ In 2012, Tehran arranged with then Ecuadoran President Correa to “establish a clandestine banking relationship between an Ecuadoran dollarized bank and a consortium of sanctioned Iranian financial institutions. The plan called for encrypted communications between the banking structures in both nations, with the decryption key to be held by the Iranian ambassador in Quito, Ecuador.”⁵¹⁴

In 2010, ALBA nations began transactions using a new monetary system called the Sistema Unitario de Compensación Regional (SUCRE), a virtual currency for the alliance intended to replace the U.S. dollar as the primary currency for trade in Latin America.⁵¹⁵ The SUCRE presented Iran with an additional method for laundering sanctioned funds and gaining access to U.S. dollars without having to go through traditional global financial systems.⁵¹⁶ When the JCPOA was adopted in 2015 and Iran regained access to the global banking infrastructure,

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with an Iran SME, May 11, 2021; interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁵⁰⁸ “Brothers in Arms?” 2012.

⁵⁰⁹ Rodil, 2014, p. 64.

⁵¹⁰ Gordon and Talley, 2020.

⁵¹¹ Eric Schmitt and Julie Turkewitz, “Warship Off Africa Is Part of Push Against Venezuela,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2020.

⁵¹² Perez, 2014, pp. 52–53.

⁵¹³ Warmouth, 2012.

⁵¹⁴ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

⁵¹⁵ Perez, 2014, pp. 51–52, 59.

⁵¹⁶ Hirst, 2014, p. 26.

Tehran had less of a need to rely on ALBA banking services, and Iranian activity in Latin America noticeably decreased.⁵¹⁷

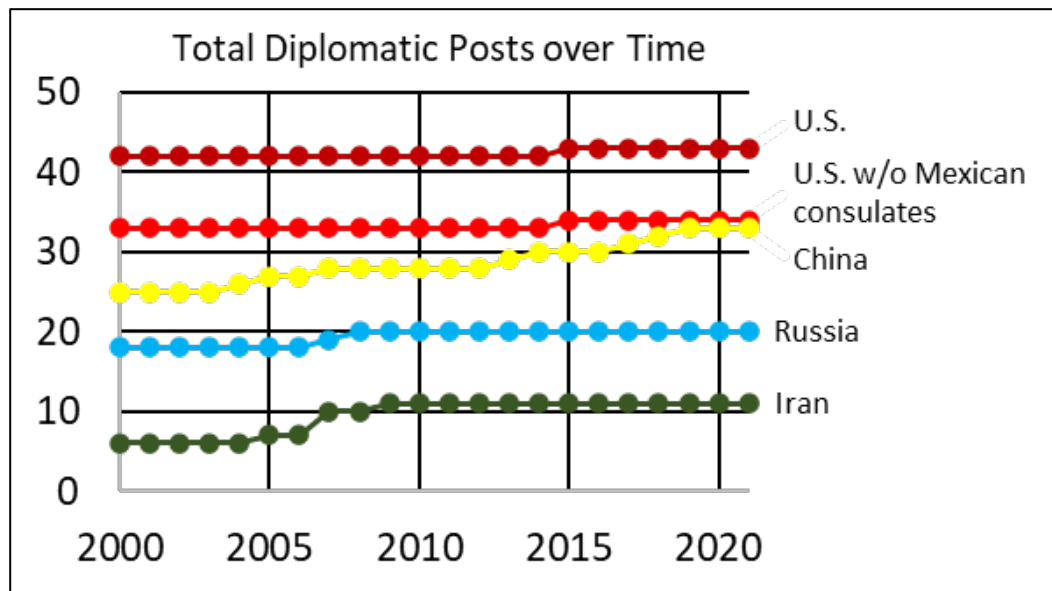
Conclusion

This chapter has been about the objectives and activities of U.S. adversaries in LAC. The following is a brief summary of the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic trends of China, Russia, and Iran within the region.

Diplomatic Trends

The United States has an extensive and historical diplomatic presence in the Western Hemisphere, having established embassies and consulates throughout the region for decades. However, without counting the nine U.S. consulates in Mexico, China has all but matched the number of America’s diplomatic posts in the region in recent years. Russia and Iran have also increased their diplomatic presence in LAC but still remain well below the United States and China, as depicted in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13. Total U.S., Chinese, Iranian, and Russian Diplomatic Posts in Latin American and Caribbean Countries



SOURCES: Tabulated data from Figures 3.5 and 3.12; multiple other sources (see Appendix G).

Of course, the presence of diplomatic posts alone is not a perfect indicator of the strength of diplomatic relations, and the United States benefits from a long tradition of engagement. From Beijing’s perspective, seven LAC countries have the highest status of the Chinese diplomatic

⁵¹⁷ Farah and Babineau, 2019.

hierarchy—“comprehensive strategic partnership”—which suggests a desire for greater investments in many LAC relationships. The PRC also recognizes the importance of relationship building at local governance levels that may often go unseen in addition to government-to-government partnerships.

Russia, because of the importance of its predecessor state, has historical relations with and diplomatic presence in all the major and mid-sized geopolitical powers in the region, but less so in Central America and the Caribbean. In the past two decades, it has been difficult for Moscow to expand its official diplomatic presence in the region. However, Moscow remains highly opportunistic and considers its diplomatic links to be very important in exercising influence in international bodies such as the UN and promoting its image as a great power. Russia is also likely to continue using the region’s multinational organizations, such as ALBA, to promote an international order that excludes the United States.

Iran has a minimal diplomatic presence in the region. Tehran’s current presence is largely centered in major economies and historical allies. Notably, the rise of close relations between Iran during the Ahmadinejad presidency and leftist Latin American governments in the late 2000s saw Iran establish embassies in several major countries, including Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador. Since then, Iran has not expanded its presence in the hemisphere. Similar to Russia, Iran’s future diplomatic promises in the region remain highly contingent on shifts in national power to like-minded, anti-U.S. regimes.

Informational Trends

China, Russia, and Iran are all highly active in the information domain in LAC. Each has invested heavily in Spanish and Portuguese media outlets that are government-run or government-controlled. These investments have proven to be a relatively low-cost, efficient way to reach millions of citizens in the region to further their respective narratives. However, the three countries also have messaging campaigns and news stories that are shared across their respective networks, along with some regional ones, to promote common narratives. These generally revolve around anti-imperialist and anti-U.S. sentiments. Even when promoting their respective form of government rule as legitimate and a better alternative to representative democracy, the message is that an American style of governance and American influence in the region are things to be eschewed. The confluence of such information campaigns across Chinese, Russian, and Iranian media outlets in the region makes counter messaging all the more challenging.

Military Trends

Large-scale arms sales, deployments of military units, and combined exercises are relatively easy to observe, but the effects of such engagements are more difficult to measure. Further, the sale or donations of nonlethal and smaller military items, such as vehicles, uniforms, and hospital beds, are often overlooked or considered to be less significant. However, China, Russia, and Iran

still benefit from the relationships and reciprocal expectations that accompany them. Figure 3.14 represents the respective military-related engagements in the region of all three countries and the United States separated into three categories: lethal military equipment transfers (e.g., small arms, vehicles, and systems with kinetic attack capabilities), nonlethal military equipment transfers (e.g., transport vehicles, riot gear, clothing), and intangible military engagements (e.g., personnel exchange, key leader engagements, trainings, exercises, defense industry agreements).

Figure 3.14. U.S., Chinese, Russian, and Iranian Military Engagements in Latin American and Caribbean Countries



SOURCES: See Appendix G.

Figure 3.14 shows that the United States is still the leader in military engagements in LAC. Russia is generally limited to the largest states that can afford to purchase new Russian weapon systems and those with deep historical relationships—Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. China has superseded Russia as the second-largest military partner in the region, largely due to Beijing’s diplomatic and economic relations, which seem highly correlated with its security-related engagements. Iran has no verifiable state-to-state military engagements in the region except with Venezuela, although efforts to rejuvenate a security partnership with Bolivia in the future would not be surprising.

Economic Trends

The story of economic relations in the region is primarily one of China’s immense progress in recent years. Iran has relatively little to offer LAC economies, and while Tehran has a continued interest in LAC’s natural resources, most of its economic activity centers around sanctions avoidance and illicit markets through its proxies. Russian arms sales to the region represent a fraction of its global activities, and Russia has significantly less trade with the region overall compared with the United States.

China, however, has explicit strategic economic objectives in LAC and has been aggressively pursuing them for the past two decades. Trade, loans, and investments throughout the region have significantly increased through nearly every major industry. Beijing uses economic diplomacy and coercion, often strengthening political relationships and increasing its influence in the region and in international bodies.

Chapter 4. Resourcing for U.S. National Security Interests in the Western Hemisphere

Chapter 2 described the strategic ends of U.S. defense policy in the Western Hemisphere, and Chapter 3 detailed how China, Russia, and Iran have become increasingly assertive in their attempts to challenge U.S. influence and damage U.S. interests in the region. In this chapter, we describe the ways and means available to SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM in their efforts to counter global rivals operating in LAC and achieve national objectives.

While ways and means can be thought of as distinct objects of analysis, in practice they are inextricably linked. Every year's defense legislation includes both an authorizations bill, defining what DoD and its agencies, services, and commands can do, and an appropriations bill, which sets the levels of funding DoD can use for these actions. Any discussion of "resourcing" must consider both these authorized ways and provided means.

These resources can be thought of as falling in several strata. The base consists of the personnel, facilities, services and funding needed to operate the CCMD and subordinate commands on a daily basis. On top of that come similar resources that enable the commands to conduct activities and operations in the theater, ranging from a team of SMEs from a military school conducting a weeklong "familiarization" session with a partner to a ship offering training and taking part in a combined exercise during a port call. Additional resources are then layered on top of these to pay the operational costs of these engagements, buy equipment and supplies for partners, or cover any number of other expenses that in some way support the U.S. agenda in the region. We will deal with each of these in turn.

It is worth noting that while these resources may be "zero-sum" within DoD, at least in the short term, we are not analyzing the relative value of resources dedicated to the region across the federal government. In fact, SOUTHCOM commanders have regularly expressed support for funding of State and USAID programs that complement DoD-run efforts. Our analysis did not find any examples worth noting where a lack of personnel or funding on the DoD side could effectively be covered by giving additional resources to other agencies, especially without significant changes in authorities for each.

Permanent Staffing at NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM

The challenge to analyzing whether these numbers are "sufficient" to conduct the business of the CCMD is that most staff work is inherently difficult to measure. The minimum personnel needed to write an "acceptable" description of a security cooperation initiative will vary with the availability of data, the complexity of the partner's needs, and the experience of the desk officer, for example. And "acceptable" might not do the initiative justice—or get it ranked highly enough

to be funded. For that reason, we conducted interviews with staffs in both AORs to gauge the overall capacity of the human capital they receive.

“Everyone is short-staffed. I have been through ten different budget and personnel reductions. All the fat in HQ is gone,” one long-service SOUTHCOM civilian official conveyed, “There are folks trying to move things around. I cannot think of anyone who is happy and has what they need.”⁵¹⁸ Another official recalled being asked their impression of staff morale a couple of weeks after arriving at their current position. “It’s a tired staff. They seem to have been running hard for a long time,” this official answered.⁵¹⁹ The official went on to argue that such an environment tends to negatively affect the more talented and capable members of the staff and hurt the social engagement important for developing bonds among co-workers.

A Pentagon-based military official expressed a similar impression and articulated the potential negative effects of operating with a small staff: “While every combatant command would say they don’t have enough people, SOUTHCOM’s staff seems especially sparse. This makes the administrative burden of pursuing, justifying, and applying for various types of resources—and conducting analyses that would actually give them some traction in the Pentagon—especially high.”⁵²⁰

Stakeholders were not only concerned by the frequency of staffing reductions, but the ways in which some of these have been implemented. A senior SOUTHCOM official criticized some recent across-the-board cuts as being abrupt and disconnected from strategic analysis. Referring to recent legislation, the official offered, “The 25-percent reduction [in staffing] levied by the NDAA without any strategic or operational endpoint was problematic. . . . Cuts since then were for realignment to China, Russia, and U.S. Space Command (SPACECOM). All those cuts were sent down in the form of them saying that they are taking specific billets. It was odd.”⁵²¹

The subordinate elements of SOUTHCOM face their own staffing challenges. A civilian official with one of SOUTHCOM’s subordinate elements argued that they were “significantly undermanned” for their doctrinal missions but were appropriately staffed for their day-to-day operations. In the event of a contingency, however, they would immediately need to request more personnel for support.⁵²² Another civilian official at the same subordinate element to SOUTHCOM echoed this theme, stating that because their staff is “one deep,” if they need to send someone to a partner nation to assist with an issue, that person must be obtained via the Request for Forces process, since the subordinate element cannot afford to lose its one specialist on the matter. One commonly pursued option is to try to reach out to Reserve or National Guard elements, though getting the necessary funds to pay for these “man-days” has grown more

⁵¹⁸ Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 24, 2021.

⁵¹⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

⁵²⁰ Interview with military official, March 16, 2021.

⁵²¹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

⁵²² Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 25, 2021.

difficult in recent years.⁵²³ NORTHCOM's component commands, according to a civilian official, do not have staff dedicated to managing security cooperation efforts who are "habitually oriented" to the AOR. Finally, this official continued, while the security cooperation staff at NORTHCOM has absorbed some reductions over the years, this workforce was small and already used to maintaining a high tempo so the effect "hasn't been that significant."⁵²⁴

According to respondents, NORTHCOM may be negatively affected by staffing billets that have been slow to evolve to reflect updated strategic priorities. One civilian official argued that the staff devoted to security cooperation has been affected by both cuts and limitations on how some staff can be utilized. On the former point, the official explained that, despite an already small staff, reductions have been made every time there has been a broader cut. The official went on to complain that a number of billets at NORTHCOM are dedicated exclusively to counternarcotics efforts. "Literally, CN [counternarcotics] folks are carrying around an old memo that says they can only do CN," the official indicated.⁵²⁵ This official said that transitioning at least half of these counternarcotics billets to a security cooperation focus would provide a better balance. Another civilian official expressed similar concern, stating that the command has relied on temporary contract support to help conduct Significant Security Cooperation Initiative (SSCI) planning and meet assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) requirements. Providing permanent solutions in these areas, this official argued, would save the U.S. government funding in the long run: "Program design is important, and AM&E done right can help us not waste money on programs that are ineffective or unlikely to work because we've done the advance planning."⁵²⁶

One staffing characteristic that benefits SOUTHCOM is the robust presence of interagency officials detailed to enduring billets within the command. This is catalyzed by the command's unique role in supporting interdiction efforts in coordination with law enforcement entities as well as the priority placed on working with State and USAID counterparts to promote development programs in the AOR and responding to humanitarian crises and natural disasters. The command works particularly closely with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and the commanders of two USCG districts are considered to be on similar footing with the SOUTHCOM commander's "big eight," which includes the leadership of the component commands and joint interagency task forces.⁵²⁷ Additionally, USCG officers serve as directors of some SOUTHCOM staff directorates. There are also representatives from the Federal Bureau of

⁵²³ Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 31, 2021. We understand this is because active component personnel already have their full annual pay and allowances allocated, but reserve component units only begin with funding for each individual's inactive training days and two-week annual training. For reserve component units to perform additional duty, other sources of funds must be identified, such as Active Duty Operational Support.

⁵²⁴ Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

⁵²⁵ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

⁵²⁶ Interview with civilian official, April 21, 2021.

⁵²⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and the Drug Enforcement Agency embedded at their command to help support and coordinate on overlapping mission sets. On the diplomatic and development fronts, there are several State Department political advisors assigned to the command as well as a number of USAID detailees.⁵²⁸ While all CCMDs maintain some interagency presence, SOUTHCOM's is particularly diverse and robust, and this is seen as a strength among stakeholders.

Assigned Forces and Temporary Operational Forces

Beyond the staff level, neither GCC has “organic” assigned operational forces under its exclusive command. This means that necessary personnel support for exercises and training missions must be specifically requested. Aside from having to compete with other GCCs for such personnel and equipment, the process proves largely inflexible to any delays or other changes to the original plan. As one civilian official noted, any change of plans means that requests must be resubmitted or canceled.⁵²⁹ SOUTHCOM's components also lack assigned forces and generally have very few resources, which deprives the combatant commander of the option of utilizing them to help make up for CCMD shortfalls. (By comparison, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's and U.S. European Command's Army and Air Force components include a wide range of assigned forces stationed in-theater that can be tasked to support security cooperation activities in the AOR without a request for forces and a Joint Chiefs of Staff tasking order.) A civilian official touched on this same point. “The components are laughably small. . . . A lot of times, the things that should be done at the component level don't get done.”⁵³⁰ The official, however, went on to laud the components for what they are able to achieve given their limited staffs.

The lack of dedicated forces also has residual effects on the availability of certain key capability requirements for the command. In particular, SOUTHCOM leadership has been persistent in conveying concerns that only a fraction of its required intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) coverage is being met under current protocols. Responding to questions during his aforementioned testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2021, SOUTHCOM commander Faller reiterated that SOUTHCOM receives only roughly 1 percent of the U.S. military's ISR allocation and that overall ISR requirements for the command are only 20 percent met. Moreover, of this 20 percent, only 8 percent is satisfied by U.S. military resources, with the remainder coming from U.S. Customs and Border Protection assets.⁵³¹ As a final note on the issue, Faller pointed out that in the fiscal year 2022 budget the ISR-related budget for the command is reduced by 46 percent. Responding to the question of what “gets left

⁵²⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵²⁹ Interview with U.S. civilian official, February 16, 2021.

⁵³⁰ Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 24, 2021.

⁵³¹ U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, 2021.

on the table” as a result of this, Faller replied, “A significant amount of movement of transnational criminal organizations, our understanding of what our competitors are up to—Russia, China, Iran.”⁵³²

It should be emphasized, however, that despite limitations on the ability of NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM to foster engagement within their respective AORs, stakeholders were in general agreement that addressing the lack of assigned operational forces does not require a redistribution of permanent forces from other entities. Rather, having increased regular access to rotational forces would be sufficient to meet the majority of the operational requirements as well as provide more flexibility to accommodate unforeseen delays to training and exercise missions that can currently result in reinitiating the resource request and approval process from the beginning.

Operational Forces Provided by the State Partnership Program in Latin America and the Caribbean

SOUTHCOM interviewees pointed out that the command, with no assigned forces of its own, has become adept at taking advantage of alternative opportunities to foster regional engagement through other means. In particular, more than one interviewee noted how they have the most robust State Partnership Program (SPP) of any combatant command, whereby National Guard units from various states form a relationship with specific partner nations and engage in a host of security cooperation efforts. One senior official went so far as to call SOUTHCOM “the gold standard” among GCCs when it came to the relationship between the commander and the SPP managers and National Guard leaders.⁵³³ According to SOUTHCOM’s website, the SPP has been successfully building relationships with partner nation forces since 1993. In SOUTHCOM’s AOR, 18 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have active partnerships with defense and security forces from 24 nations in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.⁵³⁴

SOUTHCOM leadership has reportedly sought an expansion and/or replication of SPP activities. This could include a process for allowing associated National Guard units to conduct more regular training, rather than just being one of the personnel options considered to support an approved Section 333 effort,⁵³⁵ as well as increasing the opportunities to send SMEs to provide other types of useful instruction and manage key leader engagements with partner nations.⁵³⁶ In an AOR where engagement with partner nations is key and with current staffing

⁵³² U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, 2021.

⁵³³ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

⁵³⁴ U.S. Southern Command, “State Partnership Program in Latin America and the Caribbean,” webpage, undated-b.

⁵³⁵ As we explain later in this chapter, Section 333 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code authorizes most of the security cooperation funding for NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM.

⁵³⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

levels at SOUTHCOM making the sustainment of this challenging, such steps would help to fill the gap.

Title 10 Authorities That Enable NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM Activities

Turning to the explicitly monetary resources the two commands are given, the bookkeeping is even more complex than for personnel. Within DoD, some funds are allocated directly to the CCMDs, but most are either sent first to a service that provides administrative and logistics support to the command, or to a DoD office that then allocates the resources among the CCMDs. At the interagency level, DoD sometimes has a role in the execution of some funds allocated to the State Department, and sometimes State influences how DoD-appropriated funds can be spent. In the rest of this chapter, we will attempt to map as clearly as possible this range of means available to SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM.

One command dollar figure used to summarize SOUTHCOM's resourcing is the command budget of roughly \$1 billion per year, which still does not include some of the civilian and military personnel it has access to. Of this, roughly one-third is counternarcotics funding, which primarily supports Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-South) and some of the radars it utilizes for its specific mission. About \$250 million is allocated to general security cooperation efforts, including Section 333 funding, exercises, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, IMET, and a handful of other small programs. Finally, the remaining funds come from the Army in the form of operations and maintenance (O&M) funding, the bulk of which supports headquarters costs and some commander's discretionary funds.⁵³⁷ Importantly, not all of this funding moves through SOUTHCOM's headquarters; in many instances, the funding provider engages directly with the implementing entity.⁵³⁸ While the bulk of this funding is allocated via Title 10 (DoD) authorities, an important contribution to security cooperation efforts is also provided through Title 22 (State Department/USAID) authorities. Each of these will be discussed in greater detail below.

NORTHCOM's mission sets focus primarily on the U.S. homeland, but it also manages a relatively small but important security cooperation portfolio that includes Mexico and the Bahamas and incorporates both Title 10 and Title 22 funding. Mexico, with its more established military force, views its relationship with the United States as more of a peer than a recipient of donor assistance. As a civilian official explained, "They want to be a regional defense leader and export defense capabilities. They are less interested in sponsorship than partnership."⁵³⁹ The Bahamas, with a very small defense force, has more modest requirements for equipment and

⁵³⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

⁵³⁸ Email exchange with civilian official, July 25–26, 2021. Of the \$1.25 billion budget request for FY22, the official conveyed that \$575 million (or roughly 46 percent) would actually pass through the command. This includes \$273 million in O&M funding and \$152 million in Title 10 Security Cooperation funds.

⁵³⁹ Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

materiel but values opportunities to improve its capabilities with U.S. counterparts. Because of these factors, U.S. officials tended to emphasize the importance of conducting exercises with these partners, especially Mexico, and offering them opportunities to train with U.S. counterparts. “In today’s environment of great power competition,” a civilian official contended, “security cooperation can get a lot of mileage out of shaping the strategic environment and setting conditions for success of the overall NDS.”⁵⁴⁰

It is also important to recognize Congress’s role in not only allocating bulk funds for DoD and State/USAID annual expenditures, but in being prescriptive in terms of how and where to allocate certain funds granted under certain authorities. Such earmarking effectively overrides some disparities of opinion with the agency in question, and the practice is prevalent with regard to the region. “In the Western Hemisphere a lot of our programs are earmarked,” a civilian official asserted, “From a strategic standpoint that always puts us in a tough position where we end up getting pulled somewhat back to reality at a time of appropriation in order to satisfy the requirements.”⁵⁴¹ Such “plus-ups” help to address urgent requirements but can be difficult to fully spend if allocated late in a fiscal year, and their ad hoc nature makes them more of a stopgap than a reserve that recipients can depend on or plan to.

In addition to more typical security cooperation measures, SOUTHCOM maintains a statutory mission to conduct detection and monitoring at JIATF-South in support of broader interagency efforts to interdict illicit trafficking. This provides another means for supporting partners’ efforts to conduct maritime and ground interdiction and air monitoring. U.S. efforts can help build up domain awareness, border security, all-domain interdiction for partners, so that they can work and receive information from JIATF-South and conduct their own operations.⁵⁴²

As previously mentioned, each CCMD receives a base amount of O&M funding to provide basic support to the headquarters and provide the commander with a limited amount of discretionary funding that can be used to support key-leader and SME engagements; security cooperation priorities, such as exercises; and other underresourced areas, such as ISR. In addition, services provide funding support to component elements and other departmental funding helps to support specific initiatives, such as national intelligence resources and programs such as SPP. This section, however, will focus on the Title 10 funds that support security cooperation and counternarcotics efforts in LAC. For SOUTHCOM, these two accounts make up nearly 40 percent of the overall command budget request for FY22 (\$482 million out of \$1.25 billion). At NORTHCOM, the FY21 estimate for Title 10 security cooperation is roughly \$27 million. Additionally, the commands coordinate closely and support their respective partner nations in similar events, such as exercises and familiarization visits. SOUTHCOM routinely coordinates with NORTHCOM on things such as regional conferences involving Central

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁴¹ Interview with U.S. official, January 15, 2021.

⁵⁴² Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

America and the Caribbean and on operations carried out by JIATF-South in areas that overlap with the NORTHCOM AOR.⁵⁴³

According to some interviewees, the transition from shaping resource requests from the more traditional counternarcotics perspective to efforts geared more toward GPC objectives, particularly in an economy-of-force environment, has been gradual. This is a matter of both evolving bureaucratic norms and a continuing need to address current threats. On the latter point, part of the issue is that efforts to address the negative impacts of TCOs continue to be funded via counternarcotics authorities. According to one official, “It’s tough for the [SOUTHCOM] combatant commander to break from CN and focus on GPC because TCOs are undermining everything that’s going on in Central America” and throughout the region.⁵⁴⁴

Respondents from SOUTHCOM noted that the lack of sufficient resourcing tends to be felt most acutely in their ability to engage with partner nations in their respective AORs, despite such relationship-building being a key mean of both competing with other state actors and maintaining access and influence. A military officer in SOUTHCOM stated bluntly, “We are not receiving enough resources to maintain a persistent presence in the AOR” for what would be considered “soft-power” engagements. This can feed a “neglect-panic cycle” as both the command and its subordinate elements scramble to react to inroads made by an adversarial state and/or to address a contingency such as a natural disaster or the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.⁵⁴⁵

One of the most common themes of interviews with NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM personnel is that, as commands responsible for nonkinetic regions that are not home to a priority adversary, they are considered a lower priority than other commands. Nevertheless, there is a consistent feeling that even a minimal threshold of resourcing proves difficult to secure and that modest increases can have potentially significant impact. As a civilian official at a subordinate element of SOUTHCOM put it, “Resources are always a problem. We fight for limited resources from SOUTHCOM, and we get very little support from [our service]. We’re just not a priority.” This official went on to argue that SOUTHCOM struggles to even get “POM dust” through the formal processes that would put the command in a position to partner with countries in its AOR. “We could do a lot with \$3–5 million per year and we just can’t get it,” they concluded.⁵⁴⁶

SOUTHCOM’s requests for equipment and materiel tend to be modest in comparison with other GCCs, and SOUTHCOM reportedly attempts to leverage this difference when engaging with the Pentagon. According to a civilian official, they make the argument that while U.S. Indo-Pacific Command or U.S. Central Command might ask for ten cruisers or destroyers, if SOUTHCOM can obtain just one cruiser, the impact will be significant. Even if a reallocation

⁵⁴³ Interview with U.S. civilian official, February 16, 2021.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with U.S. military official, March 23, 2021.

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with civilian official, March 31, 2021. In this context, “POM dust” is a colloquial term referring to small allocations of funding associated with the Pentagon’s annual budgeting cycle.

means that another GCC would relinquish one of the many they have been given, the one ship would have a larger relative impact in the SOUTHCOM AOR.⁵⁴⁷ A senior official at SOUTHCOM contended that the command's economy-of-force status means that they are accustomed to being efficient. According to this official, SOUTHCOM is effective at "spending everything we're given. We are ready to execute whenever we're told how much we're getting."⁵⁴⁸

A U.S. military official provided an example of how a small increase in resources had a significant impact for SOUTHCOM. During a recent initiative to increase interdiction of TCOs, the command had access to three to four littoral combat ships (LCSs) in summer 2020 that were used to help train partner nations how to better interdict narcotics. This was seen as a significant improvement over the one LCS that is typically available to the command. The officer went on to explain that if SOUTHCOM could also be provided two destroyers, with their larger size and extended range, this would allow the command to expand partnerships on the Southern Cone of the AOR that are not otherwise easily accessible with current resources and/or have ships out to sea on missions for longer durations.⁵⁴⁹

Building Partner Capacity—Section 333 Authority

The FY17 NDAA made a concerted effort to amend the ways in which DoD allocates security cooperation funding by consolidating a number of activities under one newly established authority. These activities, specified in Section 333 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, are (1) counterterrorism operations, (2) counter-weapons of mass destruction operations, (3) counter-illicit drug trafficking operations; (4) counter-transnational organized crime operations, (5) maritime and border security operations, (6) military intelligence operations, and (7) operations or activities that contribute to an international coalition operation that is determined by the Secretary of Defense to be in the national interest of the United States.⁵⁵⁰ As a result of this streamlining of authorities, Section 333 funding is by far the largest stream of Title 10 security cooperation funding for both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM, accounting for 77 percent (\$27 million out of a total of \$35 million) and 86 percent (\$133 million out of \$154 million), in their respective FY22 budget requests.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with civilian officials, April 12, 2021.

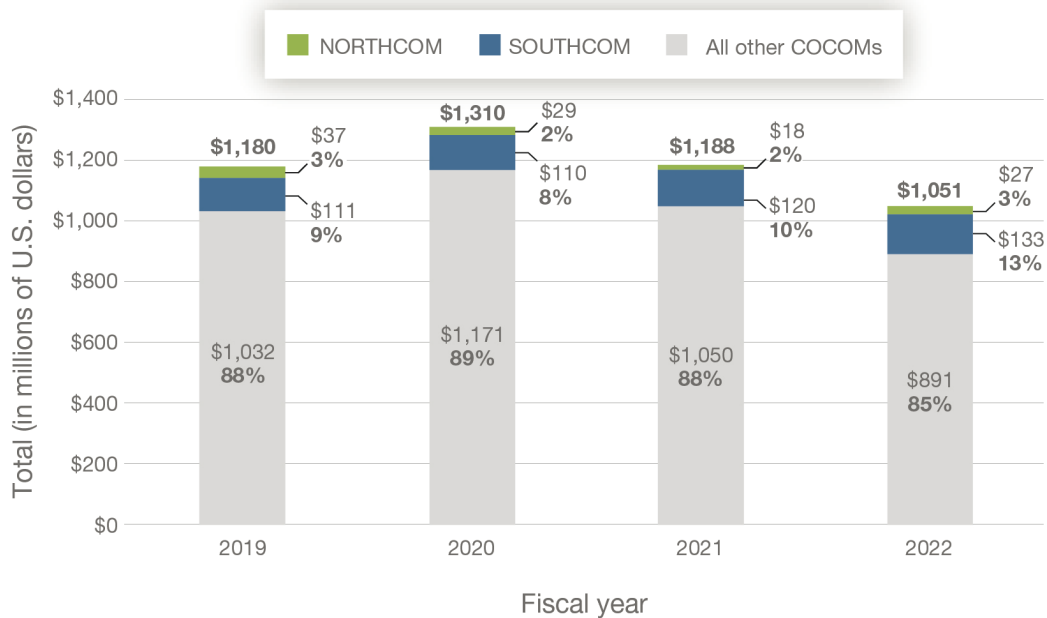
⁵⁴⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

⁵⁴⁹ Interview with military official, March 30, 2021.

⁵⁵⁰ See Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Section 333 Authority to Build Capacity," webpage, undated.

⁵⁵¹ Figures according to FY22 budget requests for NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM (provided separately by each command). See Appendix C.

Figure 4.1. Section 333 Funding



SOURCES: NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM data provided by respective command; Office of the Secretary of Defense, Congressional Budget Justifications, Fiscal Years 2020–2022.

According to a senior official, one positive result of the consolidation of authorities is that it has helped SOUTHCOM shift some of its security cooperation focus away from counternarcotics authorities, which was the source of much of its previous funding, and widen the scope to include other evolving priorities. “Before NDAA17, activities had to have a link back to detection and monitoring. We couldn’t do any medical or logistical support. On 333, it expanded that.”⁵⁵²

Another emerging topic of concern where the Section 333 consolidation has proven beneficial is in the cyber realm. As discussed in the previous chapter, China and Russia have become more assertive in both promoting their cyber services to potential partners in LAC, as well as reportedly being complicit in cyber attacks against U.S. partners, such as Colombia. With a clear need for increased capabilities to contend with such a new threat, SOUTHCOM leadership worked to gain approval for cyber training programs under Section 333 authorities. After two years of trying, according to a senior official, they were able to “crack the code” and receive Section 333 funding to support such projects.⁵⁵³ This is particularly timely, given that in January 2021 SOUTHCOM unveiled its Network Operations and Security Center (NOSC), intended to serve as the command and control of network management and cybersecurity activities throughout its enterprise. The command intends to host defense officials from partner

⁵⁵² Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁵³ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

nations at the NOSC and utilize such engagements to inform country-specific plans for tailored training in the cyber domain.⁵⁵⁴ In August 2021 SOUTHCOM selected cyberspace operational awareness as one of two areas of focus (along with space challenges) for its annual South America Defense Conference, which included participation from officials representing eleven South American countries.⁵⁵⁵

Officials at NORTHCOM voiced similar sentiment about the benefits of the establishment of Section 333 authorities. A civilian official conveyed that, at NORTHCOM, the strategic emphasis of GPC and subsequent streamlining of security cooperation authorities in the FY17 NDAA were welcome developments. These developments, this official explained, allowed the command to more directly tie its security cooperation proposals to defense priorities. Prior to this, resourcing decisions in the AOR were most associated with authorities aligned with counternarcotics initiatives. As the official indicated, 80 to 90 percent of security cooperation resources for Mexico were made available through counternarcotics accounts. This was, however, attributable more to the availability of funding than to counternarcotics' place in DoD priorities.⁵⁵⁶

There have been, however, some drawbacks to the new arrangement. For instance, the Central Transfer Account (CTA) was managed by the office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats (CN>) in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) and, due in large part to its counternarcotics focus, was a consistent source of regional building partner capacity (BPC) funding for SOUTHCOM. As part of the FY17 realignment of security cooperation authorities, however, the CTA was merged into Section 333. This more flexible authority meant that SOUTHCOM now had to compete for these funds with the other GCCs, which were no longer largely excluded because of eligibility restrictions. As a result, SOUTHCOM faced immediate reductions in its overall BPC allocations.

This unintended consequence was partially rectified after SOUTHCOM officials reached out to congressional staffers, who agreed to “fence off” some of the former CTA funding within the Section 333 appropriation, but the effect of the change is still felt. While such congressional intervention can help ensure that GCCs receive unallocated resources deemed necessary, such supplements can introduce other challenges. As a civilian official explained, the funding tends to come with tight time restrictions, as it must be spent in the fiscal year in which it is provided. This means that it is generally limited to programs that have already been planned and coordinated well in advance, rather to address emerging requirements that would need to go through the program design process.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ U.S. Southern Command Public Affairs, “U.S. Southern Command Unveils New Network Operations and Security Center,” *Diálogo: Digital Military Magazine*, January 6, 2021.

⁵⁵⁵ U.S. Southern Command, “SOUTHCOM Discusses Regional, Cyber and Space Security with South American Defense Leaders,” press release, August 17, 2021.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with civilian official, April 21, 2021.

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with civilian official, March 3, 2021.

Additionally, at a departmental level, GCCs no longer receive a base amount of security cooperation funding that they then seek approval to spend. Rather, all GCCs now compete with each other for Section 333 and other related funding via a department-wide process that incorporates feedback from stakeholders in the Pentagon and takes the better part of a year to complete. Revolving around the new concept of Significant Security Cooperation Initiatives (SSCIs), the process requires GCCs to work with their corresponding regional office in OSD-P and the Security Cooperation office in OSD-P to identify security cooperation priorities in their AOR and draft detailed submissions at the country or subregional level. These SSCIs are consolidated at the global level, scored by both the GCC and OSD-P based on established criteria (NDS alignment, feasibility, and stakeholder priorities), and prioritized. Based on the total funds provided by Congress, a “cut line” is then established. The process incorporates feedback from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the Joint Staff, and the services and goes through two levels of review before being approved by OSD-P.⁵⁵⁸

In fall 2020, DoD also issued new guidance outlining ways in which the department should pursue security cooperation in the context of strategic competition. The classified document, known as the “Guidance for the Development of Alliances and Partnerships” (GDAP), also provides revised prioritization of all nations with which the United States engages in security cooperation efforts. Thus, both the SSCI process and GDAP represent a new phase in how the Pentagon intends to ensure that security cooperation efforts are more coordinated and aligned with strategic guidance. As will be seen, however, these new processes have presented new challenges that are still being analyzed and, in some cases, addressed.

At the GCC level, some officials bristle at a system they feel is over-centralized and deprioritizes the views of their more intimate understanding of trends and requirements in their AOR. This frustration is compounded by the fact that GCC commanders are not provided with a baseline amount of funding with which to pursue the bulk of their security cooperation efforts, or a minimum level to expect from the SSCI-ranking process. Even the GCC’s own prioritization of SSCIs within its AOR can be modified in the final ranking. One senior official stated bluntly that the implementation of the changes to security cooperation processes legislated in the FY17 NDAA “has been something the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and former USSR would cheer because it took authority away from the COCOM [combatant command], which wasn’t the intent of Congress.”⁵⁵⁹ The senior official went on to state that this as well as the GDAP and SSCI process have resulted in micromanagement at the expense of flexibility and insight from the GCCs, who have the most in-depth knowledge of their respective AORs and where assistance would be put to best use. “When you do the math,” a senior GCC official argued,

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with civilian official, March 12, 2021.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

“COCOMs get a 12 percent stake in the voting for SSCI scoring. . . . This isn’t what was needed in the era of competition.”⁵⁶⁰

Though a minority, some DoD stakeholders at the GCC level felt that writing and reviewing the SSCI is a necessary, if time-consuming, process that utilizes comprehensive planning to determine projects that are truly aligned with strategic priorities. According to one civilian official, “SSCIs are supposed to be well thought-out initiatives in which you go down to a country and professionally assess what they really need, [and] build a five-year Program of Action Memorandum that shows the effects you’re trying to create with objectives that make sense.”⁵⁶¹

Regardless of where one stands on the process of allocating GCC funding, respondents ranged from generally positive to slightly dissatisfied with the outcomes and the way the system is adjusting after some early setbacks. As a senior official stated “I think the amount of funding made available for 333 seems to be about right—especially now that . . . for FY21, the money all came out as two-year money, so we weren’t in a rush to obligate. . . . The ability to take money over into a second year will really help us in the training aspect, so I think that’s a positive.”⁵⁶² Another senior official, however, felt that the near-term estimate of SOUTHCOM receiving roughly \$130 million per year in Section 333 funding, below its desired amount of \$200 million annually, would have a significant impact on its ability to shape its AOR.⁵⁶³

In the NORTHCOM AOR, emphasis has transitioned away from the purchase of major equipment and platforms, as Mexico has become more independent and is increasingly making such transactions via the foreign military sales (FMS) process. (FMS must still be approved by the U.S. government, but it is less restrictive because it involves the purchaser’s own money, not U.S. funds.) A civilian official noted that at times over the past decade, DoD would provide upward of \$110 million in security cooperation to Mexico in a single year. The current goal is to draw this down to roughly \$20 million annually.⁵⁶⁴ Another civilian official mentioned that the current priority from a security cooperation standpoint is to improve sustainment and interoperability capabilities.⁵⁶⁵ Because of this, NORTHCOM respondents felt that the Section 333 funding provided thus far was largely in line with command priorities.

Ironically, the Section 333 authority is criticized for being both unresponsive to changes on the ground and weak in long-term predictability. As a senior official explained, under Section 333 there is no process for responding to emergent requirements: “If something changes, then there is no way to do a change without going back and everyone votes on it. It isn’t fungible.”⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

⁵⁶¹ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

⁵⁶² Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁵⁶³ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with civilian official, April 21, 2021.

⁵⁶⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

For instance, if political developments in one country result in U.S. assistance being placed on a hold, that funding can be cut automatically and/or transferred to another project outside the AOR. Under previous authorities, such as those tied to counternarcotics, all the command had to do was go back and get senior approval before moving the money. “The money was more fungible. Now, the process is overwhelming,” the senior official concluded.⁵⁶⁷ At the same time, none of the authorities allow for longer-term commitment to countering malign influence by building capability with a partner nation. Such a longer-term authority would be useful to strategic competition, the official continued, because China is pursuing long-term investment opportunities, and competing with this requires making commitments that are longer than one or two years in duration.⁵⁶⁸

Authorities Without Funding Impact Section 333

A number of respondents pointed out that while the bulk of Title 10 security cooperation funding is allocated to address the seven missions under the Section 333 authorization, there are related authorities that do not typically receive dedicated funding. Those cited include Section 321 (Training with friendly forces), Section 322 (Training with friendly special operations forces), and Section 331 (Support to operations conducted by friendly foreign countries). In each case, officials stated that although they are authorized to utilize these authorities, there is rarely if ever departmental funding made available for them. This effectively means that a commander would have to fund these out of their limited O&M funding, which, as a senior official explained, is modest at NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM especially because they have no assigned forces under their command.⁵⁶⁹ Referring to the Section 321, 322, and 331 authorities, another senior official made a similar assertion: “We don’t have a lot of extra O&M [funding] like PACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] and EUCOM [U.S. European Command] because we don’t have forces assigned.”⁵⁷⁰ Both senior officials noted that the U.S. Army recently assigned one of its security force assistance brigades to the AOR to provide additional support, but questions remain as to how this will be funded in the medium term under current arrangements. “There’s kind of a disconnect,” a senior official concluded, “where the authority’s fine, but there’s a lack of [O&M] funding to use the authority.”⁵⁷¹

Multiple interviewees complained that the resources provided to NORTHCOM to carry out exercises is insufficient. One civilian official noted that a way to compensate for some of this shortfall is to coordinate with SOUTHCOM on exercises that they sponsor. “SOUTHCOM has a [comparatively] robust annual exercise program. . . . Mexico and, to a lesser extent, the Bahamas

⁵⁶⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with civilian official, April 21, 2021.

⁵⁶⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁵⁷¹ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

are involved in many of SOUTHCOM's exercises and training [events] when appropriate."⁵⁷² The official went on to explain that on an annual basis roughly half of the requested exercise funding falls below the budget cut line, but that NORTHCOM has become adept at finding additional funding and opportunities to help fill the gap.⁵⁷³ Another civilian official noted that, for the most part, opportunities for NORTHCOM to conduct bilateral exercises with Mexico and the Bahamas are minimal, and instead the countries are limited to participating in multilateral exercises organized by SOUTHCOM.⁵⁷⁴ One way to address this, the official concluded, would be to have either assigned or routinely allocated forces available to build habitual partnerships with partner nations.

As a result of the disparity of funding in these accounts, the GCCs sometimes find themselves in a position where it is desirable to blur the lines between authorities in order to obtain resourcing for a priority. As a senior official explained, "Sometimes we'll put something under 333 and staffing will come back to us and say it fits better under 321, etc. Yeah, that's great, but how would I pay for it? It's almost like you're writing for money, not necessarily for the correct authority."⁵⁷⁵

Overseas Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster, and Civic Aid

After BPC/Section 333 funding, Overseas Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) is the next most sought-after line of security cooperation funding at both NORTHCOM (\$7 million, about 26 percent) and SOUTHCOM (\$20 million, about 13 percent). OHDACA funds support three DoD-managed programs: Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief, and Humanitarian Mine Action. Importantly, these efforts are strictly military-to-civilian, in that they are intended to complement military-to-military initiatives but cannot be provided to a military entity within a partner nation.⁵⁷⁶ This characteristic, as well as the contention that the process for obtaining this funding is too time-consuming, especially when considering similar efforts by adversaries in the region, were cited as obstacles by some U.S. officials.

In describing the disparity between the processes of allocating OHDACA and the amount of funding provided, a senior U.S. official cited this as a key area where the United States is falling short with regard to GPC: "Another [concern] is humanitarian assistance and how [adversaries] are able to maneuver. We are being outcompeted because the length of time [to obtain OHDACA funding] is too long. . . . We are getting outmaneuvered every day of the week and nobody wants to hear that, but it is the truth."⁵⁷⁷ This was recently demonstrated as the command struggled to

⁵⁷² Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁷³ Interview with civilian official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁷⁴ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

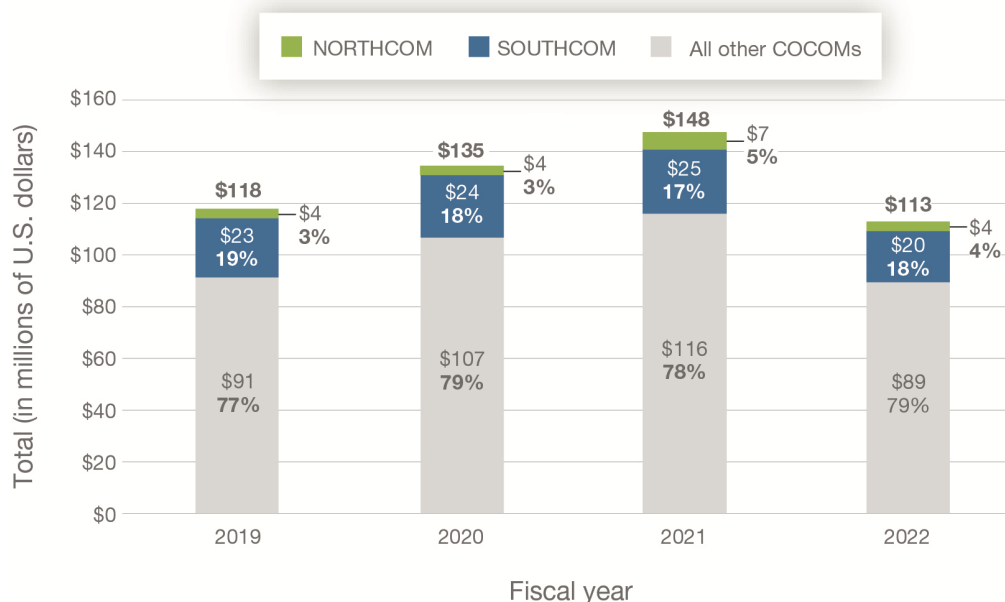
⁵⁷⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁵⁷⁶ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget Estimates: Operations and Maintenance, Defense-Wide Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid*, February 2020, p. 3.

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

provide assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in its AOR. The command was eventually able to direct a handful of humanitarian assistance projects, though with a \$15,000 cap, and for roughly six months this represented the only direct assistance provided by the United States in the region. Another important limitation is that humanitarian assistance cannot be provided to another nation’s military, despite the fact that in many countries they also maintain a domestic security responsibility. According to the senior official, “The military partner, you cannot do anything for them, but you can donate to the ministry of health. The partner nation doesn’t believe it when the commander tells them that. They don’t understand. That has to change. . . . The limitations are so restrictive that you cannot be competitive.”⁵⁷⁸

Figure 4.2. Overseas Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster, and Civic Aid Funding



SOURCES: NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM data provided by respective command; Office of the Secretary of Defense, Congressional Budget Justifications, Fiscal Years 2020–2022.

Another senior SOUTHCOM official reiterated this last point, claiming that when they explain the nonmilitary aspects of humanitarian assistance authorities, the partner nations find it difficult to comprehend. The senior official went on to recommend that authorities be put in place permitting some small, flexible funds that can be allocated to basic military needs, such as helmets and boots, which can help the United States better compete with ways in which China offers similar support.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

Other officials couched the military-to-military assistance under OHDACA as a logical way to develop the partner nation's military capability to respond to crises and provide additional support to civilian agencies. As a senior official proposed regarding OHDACA:

I wish there was something in one of our authorities that would allow us to train and equip partner nation militaries to support the entities in their countries that are the lead for disaster response so the U.S. doesn't have to keep going to do that. We talk about this every year for the Caribbean, and then every year a hurricane comes and wipes out some island and we come in to provide the response. The partners are willing to do it, but don't have the equipment to do it. And it's not that big an investment. But I can't use OHDACA for it—OHDACA works with non-military units. . . . it never made sense to me.⁵⁸⁰

Yet another senior official repeated this recommendation by saying that authorities should be amended to allow for what they termed a Commander's Assistance Program. Modeled on the existing Humanitarian Assistance Program, this effort would permit the commander to make small military-to-military payments of \$50,000 or less to assist with an immediate requirement and could be made available via region-specific funding, akin to the European and Pacific Deterrence Initiatives, though at a much lower figure. This was part of a general theme that limited funds provided with more flexibility to the command is the best way to more effectively secure U.S. objectives in the Western Hemisphere. "We're not talking millions [of dollars]," they argued, "we're talking tens of thousands . . . but I think it could go a long way."⁵⁸¹ Such authorities are necessary in such an atmosphere of competition against an assertive adversary where, they concluded, there needs to be "a little more trust between Congress, OSD, and combatant commanders."⁵⁸²

Interviewees cited recent efforts to propose changes to OHDACA authorities to make them broader and more flexible to events, but thus far nothing has materialized, in large part because of the lack of additional dedicated funding that would need to accompany them.⁵⁸³

Regional Defense Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program

Finally, rounding out the primary sources of Title 10 security cooperation funding utilized by NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM is the Regional Defense Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program, also known as the Regional Defense Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program, and formerly the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program, otherwise known as Section 345 funding. At roughly \$1 million for NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM (based on most recent figures), this is a smaller but appreciated contribution. As a senior official explained, at SOUTHCOM this is typically allocated to U.S. Special Operations Command

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

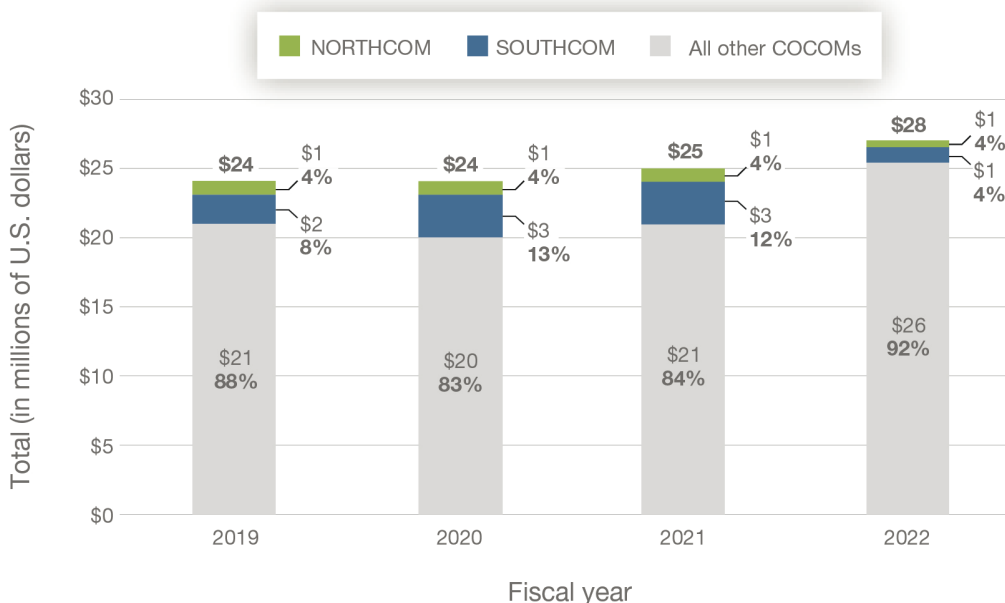
⁵⁸¹ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021.

⁵⁸² Interview with senior U.S. official, June 14, 2021

⁵⁸³ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

South and is used predominantly to conduct counterterrorism-type seminars and training conducted with additional support from SOCOM and Joint Special Operations University. “It gives us just one more tool in the toolkit to bring together mostly strategic level partners to trade tactics and procedures on counter-terrorism things. We’ve asked for it to be expanded to do Women Peace and Security,” the official concluded.⁵⁸⁴

Figure 4.3. Section 345 Funding



SOURCES: NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM data provided by respective command; Office of the Secretary of Defense, Congressional Budget Justifications, Fiscal Years 2020–2022.

Counternarcotics Funding

While strategic priorities have shifted to incorporate GPC objectives, counternarcotics efforts remain a primary mission set for SOUTHCOM, and its detection and monitoring obligations are an important component of a wider interagency interdiction missions, largely under the auspices of JIATF-South. Because of this, more than one-quarter of SOUTHCOM’s FY22 budget request (\$328 million) goes to supporting JIATF-South and related assistance provided by the services toward its missions. These authorities are unique from an administrative standpoint, in that they are allocated and managed by the office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats (CN>) in OSD-Policy and not subjected to the same processes and stakeholder deliberation as Section 333 funds. Importantly, the resources allocated under these authorities are confined to providing direct support to JIATF-South and the military materiel and equipment supporting

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

counternarcotics operations. Thus, they cannot be repurposed to carry out activities supporting security cooperation or GPC objectives.

In some instances, this funding, under Section 284 authority, can be used to provide equipment and support to law enforcement activities carried out by partner nations. A senior official gave the example of providing fuel for a partner nation to maritime patrol aircraft. Proceeding with such an expenditure, however, requires the approval of the senior U.S. law enforcement official in the appropriate embassy or for a formal request to be made from another senior level. As a result, working within the authority to provide the desired support can be time-consuming. “In my viewpoint,” the senior official concluded, “[the 284 authority] doesn’t work very well. . . . [It’s] not timely and doesn’t work for emergent events because it has to go to senior levels for approvals. . . . [It] could probably use some additional implementation guidance.”⁵⁸⁵

Aside from a limited ability to provide partner nation support, the current JIATF-South mission sets also have yet to evolve to address broader strategic priorities. A military official explained that, under current authorities and mission sets, JIATF-South remains exclusively focused on counternarcotics and counter-TCO operations. Thus, because their mandate remains tied exclusively to the interdiction of illicit material and the criminal networks that smuggle it, their resources do not assist in the detection or monitoring of any malign activities conducted by adversaries, such as illegal fishing.⁵⁸⁶ Given the interagency posture of JIATF-South, expanding its priorities and mission sets would likely require further stakeholder deliberation.

Non–Title 10 Funding Supporting or Complementing SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM Strategies

In terms of pursuing national security objectives in the region, the State Department and, to a lesser extent, USAID support a number of programs funded under Title 22 of the U.S. Code that are either directly implemented by DoD or are designed to complement DoD programs. Examples of the former include efforts to provide partner nations with materiel and other necessary equipment and enhance peacekeeping capabilities. Examples of the latter include efforts to train law enforcement, provide disaster relief, and support institutional capacity building in civilian agencies. Each of these efforts will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Each year, the State Department and USAID receive congressional appropriation via the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) bill, “which includes funding for U.S. diplomatic activities, cultural exchanges, development and security assistance,

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁵⁸⁶ Interview with U.S. military official, March 23, 2021.

and participation in multilateral organizations, among other international activities.”⁵⁸⁷ Most of the non-DoD contributions to national security objectives in the Western Hemisphere fall under State and USAID funding of “security assistance,” even though the specific characteristics are less precisely defined than the Security Cooperation accounts under Title 10. As a civilian official pointed out, within the agencies the term *security assistance* is “used loosely and not defined by law. If you ask different people, they’ll give you different answers.”⁵⁸⁸ The Title 22 accounts analyzed here are listed exclusively under Title 4 of the Department of State’s budget, entitled “International Security Assistance,” that allocate funds to the region. While these collectively capture the bulk of national security cooperation, the official went on to point out that Title 3, “Bilateral Economic Assistance,” also includes programs that benefit security objectives.⁵⁸⁹

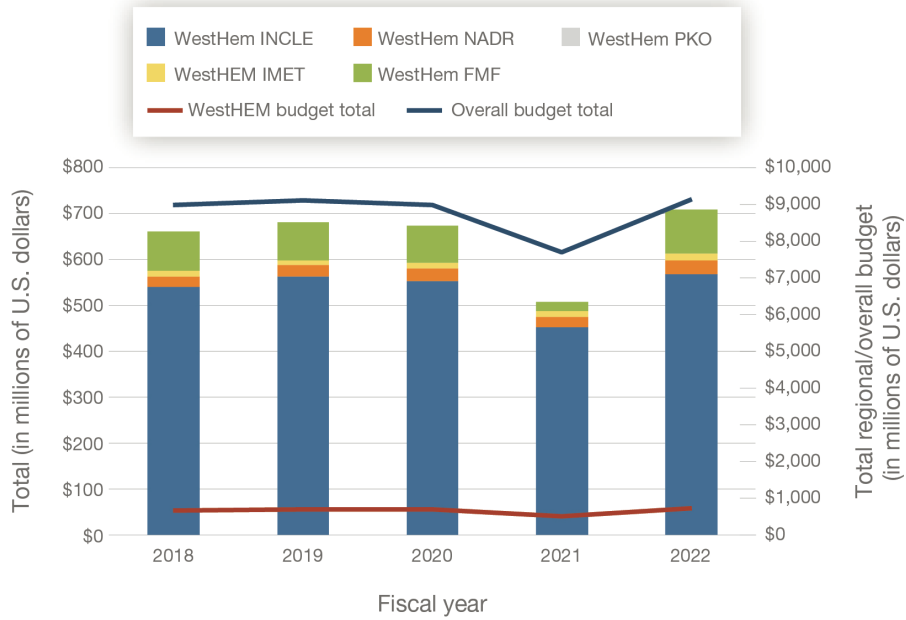
Below is a brief overview of those accounts under this that support efforts in LAC, divided by those that are implemented by DoD and those that are complementary and/or mutually reinforcing to DoD programs. Figure 4.4 provides detailed data on the proportional allocation of these accounts in LAC, and Figure 4.5 provides comparative perspective on how these allocations compare to total spending in each account.

⁵⁸⁷ Cory R. Gill, Marian L. Lawson, and Emily M. Morgenstern, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2021 Budget and Appropriations*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R46367, March 18, 2021.

⁵⁸⁸ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 14, 2020.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with U.S. official, December 14, 2020.

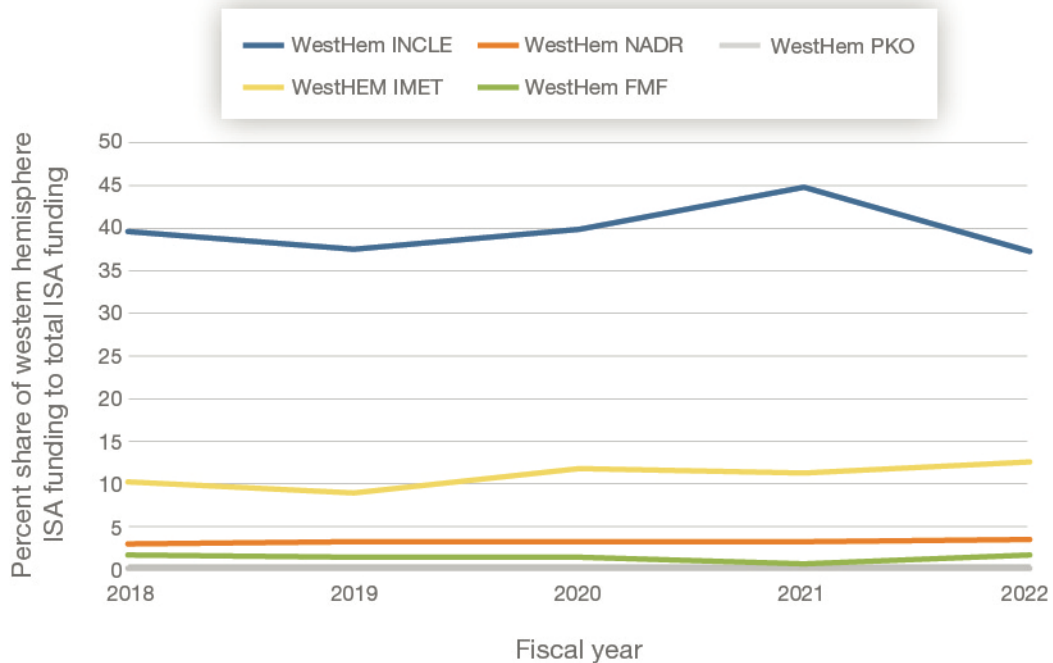
Figure 4.4. International Security Assistance Funding



SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs*, Fiscal Years 2019–2022.

NOTES: INCLE = International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement; NADR = Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs; PKO = Peacekeeping Operations; IMET = International Military Education and Training; FMF = Foreign Military Financing.

Figure 4.5. International Security Assistance Funding Comparison



SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs*, Fiscal Years 2019–2022.

NOTE: ISA = international security assistance.

Title 22 Funding Authorities Managed by NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM

In addition to Title 10 Security Cooperation funding allocated annually to DoD, the State Department oversees a substantial security assistance budget under its Title 22 authorities. For some of these authorities, however, State formally allocates funding but relies on DoD to manage and implement programs for which they are uniquely matched. Three of the largest and/or most prominent of these accounts are Foreign Military Financing (FMF), the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), and International Military Education and Training (IMET). Tables 4.1 and 4.2 depict the total amount of Title 10 Security Cooperation and Title 22 security assistance funding provided to SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM, respectively.

Table 4.1. Security Cooperation/Security Assistance Funding Provided to SOUTHCOM, FY19–22

	Fiscal Year			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Title 10 & Title 22	\$232	\$254	\$252	\$263
Title 10 (DoD)	\$136	\$142	\$146	\$154
Title 22 (DoS)	\$96	\$112	\$106	\$109

SOURCE: Data provided by SOUTHCOM staff.

Table 4.2. Security Cooperation/Security Assistance Funding Provided to NORTHCOM, FY19–22

	Fiscal Year			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total DSCA & DoS	\$59	\$43	\$36	\$41
Title 10 (DoD)	\$51	\$35	\$27	\$33
Title 22 (DoS)	\$8	\$8	\$9	\$8

SOURCE: Data provided by NORTHCOM staff.

Foreign Military Financing

The FMF program provides financing of the purchase of defense articles, services, and training, typically on a grant basis, through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system—the U.S. government’s conduit for selling, weapons, equipment, and associated training to friendly foreign countries.⁵⁹⁰

In the Western Hemisphere, FMF is by far the largest of the Title 22 programs managed by DoD. In SOUTHCOM’s FY22 budget request, FMF accounts for roughly 64 percent of overall Title 22 funding (\$70 million of \$109 million) and about 27 percent of all security cooperation

⁵⁹⁰ Susan B. Epstein and Liana W. Rosen, *U.S. Security Assistance and Security Cooperation Programs: Overview of Funding Trends*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 1, 2018, p. 21.

and security assistance funding. For NORTHCOM, according to its FY22 request, FMF accounts for 76 percent of all Title 22 funding (\$6.2 million of \$8.2 million total), but only 14 percent of all security cooperation and security assistance funding (because of more than \$35 million in Title 10 security cooperation funds).⁵⁹¹ Yet according to the Department of State’s FY22 Congressional Budget Justification, the agency is requesting a total of \$95 million for FMF cases in the Western Hemisphere, accounting for roughly 15 percent of its global request for \$6.21 billion.⁵⁹² Figure 4.6 provides comparative perspective on how FMF was allocated across GCCs from FYs 2019 to 2022. While FMF represents a relatively large expenditure, the number of recipients are more limited in the Western Hemisphere. For instance, Colombia is the single largest beneficiary by a wide margin, with a handful of other priority countries designated on an annual basis. According to the Department of State’s FY22 Congressional Budget Justification, Colombia remains a priority country, along with the countries of Central America and Ecuador.⁵⁹³

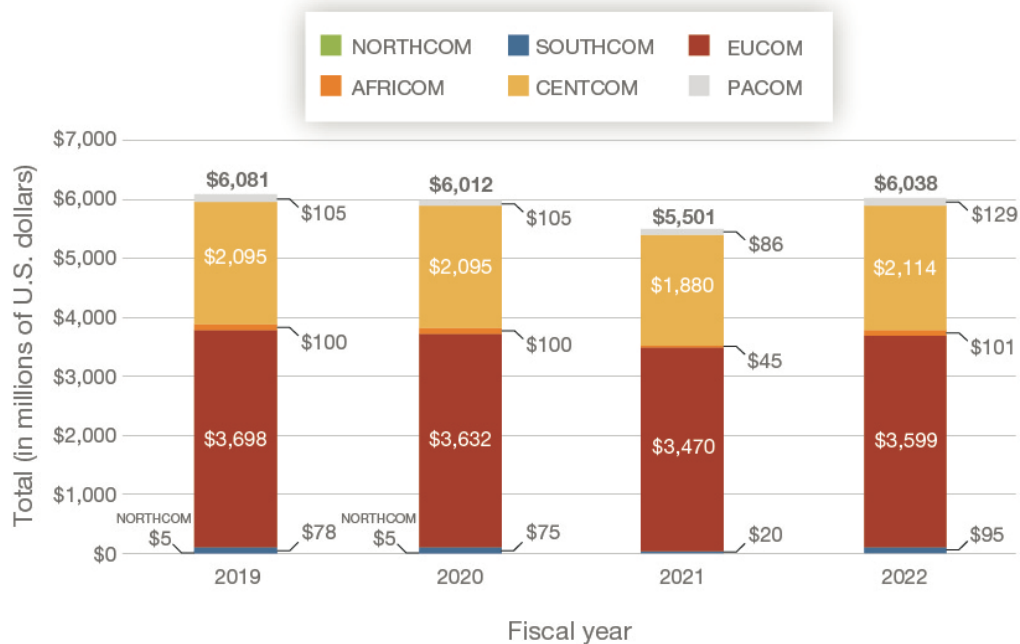
While the process for how FMF priorities are deliberated by interagency stakeholders will be described in a later section, no respondents cited FMF as an area of frustration or concern with regard to resourcing levels.

⁵⁹¹ U.S. Northern Command J592, “Security Cooperation Programs,” briefing slides, May 19, 2020, not available to the general public.

⁵⁹² U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2022*, Washington, D.C., 2021, pp. 118–119.

⁵⁹³ U.S. Department of State, 2021, p. 119.

Figure 4.6. Total Foreign Military Financing Funding by Geographic Combatant Command, FY19–22



SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs*, Fiscal Years 2019–2022.

NOTE: Amounts do not include FMF funding classified as “Other,” as it cannot be assigned to a GCC.

Global Peace Operations Initiative

For FY22, the State Department is requesting roughly \$470 million to support Peacekeeping Operations and, as a subsection to this, \$71 million to fund GPOI. This support is dedicated to assist partner nations to train, deploy, and sustain capabilities of troop and police contributors to UN and regional peace operations.⁵⁹⁴ NORTHCOM has not received funding under this in recent years; the SOUTHCOM FY22 request calls for \$20 million in support of GPOI. As with FMF, however, respondents did not mention GPOI in the context of areas of concern or potential opportunity when it came to resourcing.

International Military Education and Training

Of the primary Title 22 accounts implemented by DoD, IMET is the smallest but most critical in the eyes of many regional officials. For FY22, State is requesting \$113 for IMET worldwide. Of this, just over \$14 million is tabbed for the Western Hemisphere. This is largely in line with NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM’s FY22 budget request of \$1.75 million and \$11 million, respectively. The desire for a more robust IMET program in the region was among the

⁵⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, 2021, pp. 114–115.

most often cited requests made by DoD stakeholders, not just because of its high demand among partner nations but also because it has offered a template for adversary intervention.

Multiple interviewees pointed out that China has been aggressively courting members of LAC militaries to participate in professional military education (PME) activities hosted in China. A senior U.S. official explained that the Chinese are very specific and focused when it comes to whom they invite to participate and what their program of instruction will be. The United States, on the other hand, has yet to develop a more comprehensive plan for what it wants to achieve with its IMET offerings. Getting to the next level of competition will likely require a more deliberative process and more resources, as the generally touted relationship-building aspect of IMET may be insufficient to counter Chinese programs. “What training are we trying to do, and what result are we trying to get with this training?” asked the senior official.⁵⁹⁵ Despite the widespread concern on this issue, by all accounts the United States remains the partner of choice when it comes to these opportunities. A senior U.S. official pointed out that the Chinese currently have “ineffectual equipment, techniques and training programs,” but cautioned that Chinese dedication to these efforts means that they will likely improve over time.⁵⁹⁶

For other officials, IMET is seen as a key component of a zero-sum global competition for influence. “For IMET,” a senior official argued, “if we’re sending someone to school in the U.S., they aren’t going to China.”⁵⁹⁷ Taken from another angle, IMET provides an opportunity to compete from a position of comparative advantage in a fiscally manageable way given that partner nations continue to favor opportunities to be educated in the United States. “We’re never going to spend as much as China in the region,” a civilian official argued, “Rather, we need other ways to compete”; the official pointed to an expansion of programs such as IMET as important examples of this.⁵⁹⁸ Another senior official endorsed an expansion of IMET funding but also pointed out that participating in such courses comes with some cost to partner nations, who still pay the salary of participants and have to manage with them away from their positions for weeks or months at a time, a difficult proposition for some militaries and ministries. This point speaks to the challenge of gauging the absorptive capacity of partner nations and the extent to which they could collectively take advantage of a more robust IMET program. Without providing details, a senior official stated that there is some disagreement between SOUTHCOM and State Department officials on this question and that it was their belief that State’s underestimation in this area was contributing to lower than desired availability of IMET funding.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁵ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

⁵⁹⁶ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 14, 2021.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁵⁹⁸ Interview with U.S. civilian official, February 16, 2021.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 19, 2021.

Guyana Case Study

U.S. officials discussed Guyana as a recent example where this type of competition, along with other areas, highlights the relative level of effort and limitations of the United States and China. Guyana is small country (geographically smaller than Idaho) on the northeast coast of South America with a population of less than 800,000.^a It is also strategically located on the Caribbean, and its capital, Georgetown, is home to the headquarters for the secretariat of the 26-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM).^b Recent discoveries of massive oil fields in Guyana's territorial waters are among the world's most important new oil and gas findings in the past decade.^c With more than 8 billion barrels of recoverable crude oil, Guyana is forecasted to produce more oil than India by 2025 and to experience massive GDP growth.^d The discovery is likely to transform one of the Caribbean basin's poorest countries into one of its wealthiest.^e

The China National Corporation for Exploration and Development of Oil and Gas (CNODC) has a 30 percent stake in the consortium developing the recently discovered oil fields. Chinese companies, including Huawei, are also established in Guyana and participate in the BRI initiative.^f China's embassy in Georgetown advertises several recent bilateral activities, and Chinese support to Guyana includes the donation of flood relief supplies.^g In a March 2021 phone call between Xi and Guyanan President Irfaan Ali, Xi reportedly stressed that "both China and Guyana are developing countries and have similar positions on a series of international and regional issues,"^h a claim that is difficult to parse based on the immense differences between the two countries.

As with other countries in the Caribbean, China has long donated equipment to Guyana's police and the Guyana Defense Force,ⁱ a unified service with about 3,000 active-duty personnel in 2020.^j China also sends senior leaders of the Guyana Defense Force to China for training and relationship-building visits.^k One senior U.S. official noted that China recently offered to host five to ten Guyanese personnel on a two-year military training program with full Mandarin instruction and a heavy cyber focus. Participation in such a program, the official argued, could have significant longer-term impact, particularly in a military service as small as Guyana's. Comparatively, the United States currently sends only one Guyanese military official to a U.S. military school.^l

Another U.S. official recently involved in attempting to increase the number of U.S. PME positions available to Guyanese military personnel to two or three people made the point that if those individuals are not in American schools, they will be in Chinese schools. Guyana has a very small defense force, government, and population. Thus, regardless of the background or specialties of the Guyanese personnel, a relatively small number of officials that build lasting relationships and are influenced through their professional and educational experiences should be included in U.S. programs, the official contended.^m

It was also noted that U.S. military officials in embassies throughout the region, but particularly in small embassies such as that in Guyana, are challenged to monitor or even be aware of these kinds of differences between U.S. and Chinese efforts. The extremely small military staffs manage a range of U.S. programs and associated oversight mechanisms such as Leahy vetting, maintain relationships and awareness of host nation defense issues, serve as advisors to U.S. officials, and more. They are not staffed to closely track and evaluate Chinese and other adversary outreach through programs like PME exchanges, so they may not even be aware of the shift in relative participation and influence.ⁿ

^a Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World Factbook, "Guyana," webpage, updated June 29, 2021.

^b CARICOM, "Our Mandate," webpage, undated.

^c "ExxonMobil Makes New Discovery Off Guyana's Coast," Reuters, June 9, 2021.

^d Dylan Baddour, "Massive Guyana Oil Find Continues to Grow with Fresh Exxon Discovery," *Forbes*, January 27, 2020.

^e R. Evan Ellis, Ryan C. Berg, and Kristie Pellecchia, "China Reminds Us Why the Caribbean Is Vital to US Strategic Interests," *The Hill*, June 12, 2021.

^f Ellis, Berg, and Pellecchia, 2021.

^g Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, "Chinese Embassy Donated Flood Relief to the Civil Defence Commission of Guyana," webpage, June 16, 2021.

^h Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, "Xi Jinping Speaks with Guyanese President Irfaan Ali on the Phone," webpage, March 16, 2021.

ⁱ Ellis, Berg, and Pellecchia, 2021.

^j Central Intelligence Agency, 2021.

^k Ellis, Berg, and Pellecchia, 2021.

^l Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

^m Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

ⁿ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

Title 22 Funding Authorities That Complement NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM Activities

In addition to the national security programs managed by DoD, State maintains a robust portfolio of authorities that it manages on its own designed to help partner nations improve their capabilities in areas such as law enforcement, policing, and disaster management. As will be seen, in many cases these initiatives are intended to bolster DoD efforts and together are meant to ensure that institution-building and capacity development are occurring in both a civilian and military capacity within partner nations. Two of these programs, representing State's largest effort in LAC, are highlighted below.

In terms of USAID activities, the direct tie-ins to national security objectives are more limited. Nevertheless, as a senior official explained, DoD, State, and USAID often pursue projects that are designed to be complementary as part of mutually devised "place-based strategies," and in some cases OHDACA funding provided to civilian agencies in partner nations are intended to provide added assistance to USAID projects.⁶⁰⁰ This is particularly the case regarding USAID's Regional Disaster Assistance programs. Additionally, USAID participates in efforts under the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), a program that is funded by State but managed by USAID. Designed to provide an additional line of funding beyond USAID's typical focus areas of development assistance, economic support funds, and global health programs, as its name suggests CARSI requests must have some connection to promoting security. This often translates into rule-of-law programs and preventive measures and carries an annual contribution of roughly \$100 million per year.⁶⁰¹

Despite general consistency in regional funding allocated to State and USAID accounts over the past few years, the FY21 budget request from the Trump administration signaled a shift. The \$1.4 billion foreign assistance requested for LAC represented a decrease of 18 percent over the previous year,⁶⁰² with a good part of the requested funding for Central America cut by the administration over the objections of the USAID director.⁶⁰³ Congress restored much of this funding, but USAID advocates argue that the agency needs both a larger budget and one less subject to short-term political positions.

International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement

With an FY22 request for over \$1.5 billion globally, State's International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) program represents its second-largest effort, after FMF, and the more than \$570 million intended for the Western Hemisphere stands as State's largest allocation

⁶⁰⁰ Interview with senior U.S. official, March 5, 2021.

⁶⁰¹ Interview with senior U.S. official, March 5, 2021.

⁶⁰² Meyer, Peter J. and Rachel L. Martin, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2021 Appropriations*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 7, 2021, p. 6.

⁶⁰³ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

in the region.⁶⁰⁴ This account provides funding for the CARSI program and Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), and its wide mandate aspires to “support anticorruption efforts, improve citizen security, reduce illicit drug production and trafficking, and strengthen cooperative efforts to address irregular migration and its root causes.”⁶⁰⁵ As will be seen, given its close connection with DoD security cooperation efforts, programs pursued under INCLE are a key point of interagency coordination.

Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR)

Designed to provide critical, security-related support for issues pertaining to weapons of mass destruction, landmines, international terrorist activities, and a host of related threats, Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) span the globe. The proportion of this dedicated to LAC, however, is generally low. State’s FY22 overall request for NADR is \$900 million but, according to FY21 estimates, only about \$24 million was allocated to the region.⁶⁰⁶

Limiting Factors: Country Income Designations and Other Macroeconomic Issues

A number of respondents expressed frustration at what they felt were unnecessary limitations placed on the amount and type of U.S. assistance that can be provided to partner nations in LAC based on macroeconomic indicators that most felt were misleading.⁶⁰⁷ This is seen as a particular impediment in the context of GPC as adversaries attempting to gain a foothold in the region are unencumbered by such limitations. A senior U.S. official argued,

Another issue is the high-income designation. That rules out a whole number of strategic countries that we want to work with but we can’t, which is self-imposed. That is not an “outcompete China” agenda. If we had an outcompete China agenda, we would have the flexibility to go where the competition is the fiercest, not take countries off the table by random internal bureaucratic limitation.⁶⁰⁸

This issue is commonly referred to as “wealthy nation” status. Defense officials from both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM questioned the extent to which this term conveys an accurate assessment of a number of such designated countries and argue that the restrictions posed by this are antithetical to the prioritization of GPC. Pointing to the Bahamas as an example, one official stated that while China has invested heavily in port activities and is pressing to improve its

⁶⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, 2021, pp. 105–107.

⁶⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, 2021, p. 107.

⁶⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, 2021, p. 110; Meyer and Martin, 2021, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁷ For a more detailed explanation of these protocols, see Appendix E.

⁶⁰⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 11, 2021.

relationship with the security ministries, the United States is not permitted to provide funding that would bring members of the Bahamian security forces to the United States to participate in exercises or receive funding via the Traditional Commander's Activities (TCA) account. Considering Chinese interest and involvement, the official argued, "We should be putting our arm around the Bahamas in a big way . . . [but] for all the wrong reasons we're not investing in this country."⁶⁰⁹ Another civilian official felt it did not make sense that under these regulations Mexico, a G-20 nation, is eligible for such opportunities but the Bahamas is not.

Such income-centric designations also affect assistance provided by other U.S. stakeholders. A regional SME explained that a lot of countries in LAC are seen as middle-income and have "graduated" out of USAID's portfolio. But, given the level of inequality in the region, even OECD countries such as Chile and Colombia can have tremendous needs, such as better access to health care. As countries are recovering from the pandemic, it would be useful to consider including middle-income countries in development assistance and bolstering these key sectors that serve large segments (if not the majority) of the public that have been underfunded, understaffed, and overwhelmed under COVID-19, at least until countries have improved their own balance sheets and start investing.⁶¹⁰ Thus, particularly in the context of the unforeseen demands facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. agencies could consider reassessing the utility of such metrics when determining how best to allocate assistance resources.

Interagency Coordination and Collaboration

The GCCs responsible for executing activities in LAC work closely with other government departments and agencies in all efforts, but especially on efforts pertaining to security cooperation (Title 10 funding) and security assistance (Title 22 funding). Collaboration between these groups is vital for pursuing U.S. interests in self-reinforcing and efficient ways. Therefore, their ability to effectively coordinate activities and rely on interagency support and funds is of direct interest to hemispheric resourcing issues. Aside from shared equities, collaboration between relevant DoD and State offices is also legislatively compelled, as State maintains concurrence over the bulk of security cooperation funding, including Section 333.⁶¹¹

According to some respondents, one of the positive effects of the FY17 revamping of Title 10 security cooperation authorities is that the streamlining that took place has made it easier for stakeholders within DoD and State to better coordinate and deconflict Title 10 and Title 22 efforts. As a civilian official explained, this has allowed for a more concerted effort to ensure that the two largest programs under these titles, Section 333 and FMF, are complementary and tied and aligned with DoD's five-year plans. This has also led to State being more proactive in

⁶⁰⁹ Interview with civilian official, June 16, 2021.

⁶¹⁰ Interview with U.S. Latin America expert, May 7, 2021.

⁶¹¹ See U.S. Code, Title 10: Armed Forces, Subtitle A—General Military Law, Part I: Organization and General Military Powers, Chapter 16: Security Cooperation.

working with DoD in deliberating the types of capabilities that are most appropriate to a partner nation, rather than having the process serve as more of a “rubber stamp” for what the partner nation requested.⁶¹²

In the Western Hemisphere, expectation management is also a factor as, according to a civilian official, this region tends to receive the least amount of both Title 10 and Title 22 funding for security cooperation and security assistance.⁶¹³ Thus, persistent communication and coordination with relevant members of the U.S. country team in each partner nation is key to fostering the efficiency of the processes described below.

Overview of Processes Surrounding Coordinated Mission Sets and Activities

While informal communications and periodic working group meetings among security cooperation and assistance stakeholders at DoD and State occur with some regularity, the Joint Security Sector Assistance Review (JSSAR) presents all interested parties with a dedicated forum for deliberation and coordination. These are typically regionally focused conferences that last four to five days and are attended at the GS-15/O-6 level.⁶¹⁴ The engagement is hosted by the Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs and includes representatives from State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, as well as DoD stakeholders such as DSCA, OSD-P regional and security cooperation offices, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶¹⁵

Given that participants down to the country team level operate under the general guidance to be authority- and funding-neutral when determining security cooperation priorities, the JSSAR provides an opportunity for participants to add these elements to the equation to decide which authority or authorities are most appropriate for a given project and to more generally prioritize the collection of proposals put forward.⁶¹⁶ As a senior official described it, the JSSAR is “where we share info on what our objectives are and what our priorities are going to be, and that’s where [we] make adjustments with them on programs for the outyears.”⁶¹⁷ This is particularly useful with regard to Section 333 and FMF, two of the largest accounts under Title 10 and Title 22, respectively, which cannot fund identical efforts but can be managed in a way that they reinforce each other.

As the senior official continued, if DoD and State agree on the same objective for a partner nation, they can collectively make adjustments whereby State funds something with FMF and DoD can either find a way to complement this with Section 333 funds or adjust its request to

⁶¹² While INCLE is typically the largest Title 22 security assistance expenditure in LAC, FMF is the largest among those accounts implemented by DoD (interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020).

⁶¹³ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020.

⁶¹⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁶¹⁵ Interview with U.S. official, January 15, 2021.

⁶¹⁶ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020.

⁶¹⁷ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

fund another mutual priority.⁶¹⁸ An important aspect of these engagements is to take the specific conditions of these authorities into account. As a civilian official explained, FMF has the benefit of being able to be combined with national funds provided by a partner nation, a characteristic that Section 333 funding does not have. Thus, in certain cases, FMF can be used to persuade a partner to invest in a certain program with added U.S. support.⁶¹⁹ FMF also has the benefit of being more flexible in that changes to how it is allocated can be made more easily after it is obligated. Title 10 security cooperation funding, on the other hand, is more difficult to reappropriate should events or strategic calculations dictate.

More informally, for commonly used Title 10 accounts managed by DoD, such as Section 333 and 331, requests are coordinated with State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs and then shared among other stakeholders, such as its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.⁶²⁰ When such requests are received at the bureau level, they are also shared with staff at the relevant missions to ensure efforts are not being duplicated by other U.S.-funded projects. This is particularly the case with counternarcotics efforts, where, for instance, a local maritime unit may be eligible for assistance via both Title 10 and Title 22 funding authorities.⁶²¹ Some level of deconfliction notwithstanding, there was a general feeling that these programs largely complement each other by providing appropriate training to both military and law enforcement entities in partner nations.

Aside from resourcing levels, the question of how best to pursue strategic priorities tied to BPC has fostered increased conversations among interagency stakeholders on the extent to which proposed activities align with current funding authorities. A civilian official stated that SOUTHCOM's 7/9 (Exercises and Coalition Affairs) Directorate leverages a joint interagency working group, reinforcing interagency touchpoints and identifying which agency has the appropriate authorities for certain proposals. This includes deliberation on the extent to which authorities across stakeholder agencies can best be combined or even improved. While not traditionally a scrutinized topic, the official continued, over the span of the past few commanders there has been increased pressure "to figure it out."⁶²²

Aside from "natural tension between DoD security cooperation funds and State's security assistance" funds, stakeholders from DoD, State, and USAID were generally satisfied with the current coordination mechanisms and, even in areas of more direct overlap, said that steps are in place to ensure that efforts are complementary.⁶²³ This is especially the case following the

⁶¹⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, June 2, 2021.

⁶¹⁹ Interview with civilian U.S. official, December 21, 2020.

⁶²⁰ Interview with U.S. official, January 15, 2021.

⁶²¹ Interview with U.S. civilian official, January 15, 2021.

⁶²² Interview with U.S. civilian official, March 24, 2021.

⁶²³ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020.

overhaul of Title 10 security cooperation that occurred in FY17, which has simplified interagency coordination and deconfliction. In some cases, however, the requirement for State concurrence is considered a hindering factor, and even a challenge, by some DoD officials. In particular, one senior official stated that there are no fewer than 11 measures in their appropriation act tied to matters such as human rights, transparency, and related issues that must be certified to provide concurrence. In certain countries in LAC, the senior official acknowledged, these can be difficult to certify and, when they are not, State can place holds on things such as IMET, GPOI, FMF, and even Section 333 funding.⁶²⁴

In addition to the interagency dynamic, there are two additional factors that DoD and State representatives must incorporate. First, tracking the current status of the wealth of programs approved in different years and with different end dates across the enterprise remains a challenge. As a civilian official put it, this remains “the never-ending problem” among the various offices and entities, though DSCA is reportedly working on a system to allow for more collective monitoring of these efforts.⁶²⁵ A second factor that directly effects agency level discussion is congressional earmarks. Besides determining a minimum level of funding that must be allocated to a certain country or region, in some cases, additional “soft” earmarks that are more specific and prescriptive will be included below the “top-line” earmark. In each case, agencies do their best to accommodate these, but this often means that funds must be directed from other projects.⁶²⁶

Conclusion

From a broad strategic perspective, the objectives of DoD, State, and USAID are in close alignment in LAC. Be it the threat posed by TCOs, fragile governing institutions and corruption, disaster response, or irregular migration, each agency contributes materially to efforts designed to address each issue. While imperfect, this has resulted in an environment where communication and coordination among stakeholders is persistent and helped by having representatives from each agency collocated in key operational nodes, such as NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM headquarters. This appears to be the case especially with regard to some of the larger initiatives carried out by State and DoD. When asked whether they were aware of any synchronization difficulties between the efforts of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and DoD at the programmatic level, a civilian official expressed that they felt that the lines were clearly delineated and that methods of deconfliction are sound. “A lot of [the] mission set for INL [State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs] is complementary to what DoD is doing,” they contended, “Providing the equipment, the

⁶²⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

⁶²⁵ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020.

⁶²⁶ Interview with U.S. civilian official, December 21, 2020.

training, et cetera, to narcotics units . . . [is] for them to be able to support what DoD is trying to do in the hemisphere.”⁶²⁷ Moreover, the changes made to streamline Title 10 security cooperation authorities in the FY17 NDAA appear to have enhanced efforts at interagency coordination, even if the process for allocating these resources remains a point of frustration among DoD stakeholders.

While interagency coordination is generally effective, however, resourcing constraints continue to place limitations on the level of regional engagement pursued, especially by DoD entities. Some of the most prominent authorities supporting Title 10 Security Cooperation efforts, especially Section 333 and OHDACA, and the processes established to allocate accompanying resources exacerbate some of these challenges and place added limitations on their employment. In the context of GPC, these issues have become more pronounced as adversaries have become increasingly assertive in their engagements and investments in the region. Moreover, the lack of a base amount of both security cooperation funding and access to operational forces provided to GCCs under current regulations makes year-to-year planning difficult, and alternative options to filling funding gaps are limited, especially given modest O&M funding. It is also notable that under current authorities, resources associated with JIATF-South have very limited flexibility in being repurposed to missions that do not directly tie to counternarcotics or counter-TCO efforts.

Additionally, persistent cuts to the staffs at NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM have limited these commands’ ability to establish and sustain interaction efforts with partner nations. Programs such as SPP and the deployment of a security force assistance brigade can foster some additional opportunities, but this is limited, and questions remain about their authorities and funding levels in the longer term. More specifically, expected targets of roughly \$130 million for Section 333 funding for SOUTHCOM is below desired levels, additional funding for conducting training and exercises with partner nations lacks a dedicated funding stream and is thus widely seen as lacking, and, from a Title 22 perspective, current funding under IMET is well below demand levels from partners and particularly inadequate in the context of recent Chinese efforts to provide PME opportunities.

⁶²⁷ Interview with U.S. civilian official, January 15, 2021.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: Assessing U.S. National Security Resourcing Requirements in Latin America and the Caribbean

In the current national security strategic context, the United States is confronted by two primary threats in the Western Hemisphere. TCOs represent an enduring but evolving threat, the breadth of which is still being understood at the national level. GPC, on the other hand, represents a concern that is well articulated at the national level but requires more comprehensive implementation guidance. As the broader U.S. national security community continues to grapple with these complex, and at times overlapping, issues, stakeholders focused on these threats at the GCC and bureau level will continue to be disadvantaged when competing for resources with other global priorities that are better understood and more entrenched.

Recent changes to the ways in which some of the most substantial amounts and types of resources are allocated have introduced additional challenges. The recent streamlining of Title 10 security cooperation authorities has reportedly enhanced interagency coordination and instituted more transparency in a system that had by nearly all accounts grown unwieldy. Nevertheless, the SSCI process established by the Pentagon to annually allocate more than \$1 billion in Title 10 security cooperation funds is drawn out and taxing to staffs, which at the GCC level have been repeatedly subjected to cuts. Current protocols justifiably require validation that U.S. assistance is not provided to individuals or units credibly implicated in human rights abuses, corruption, or other illicit activities. The cumulative effect of these processes, however, is that the time between the drafting and implementation of a program is over a year. This is compounded by a lack of baseline funding and access to personnel and restrictive authorities that are inflexible to reallocation due to delays, making for a very difficult planning environment.

Search for Strategic Coherence on Key Issues and Threats

While sufficiency of resourcing is vital to pursuing overarching objectives, it is of limited utility if not expended in support of clear, coherent strategic guidance. When it comes to the two primary issues confronting LAC from a U.S. perspective, the proliferation of TCOs and GPC, clear disconnects exist in national- and operational-level interpretations. For TCOs, national guidance has yet to settle on a clear articulation of the specific ways in which these entities pose a threat to U.S. interests and the DoD role in combating them; as a result, the concept maintains a nebulous priority level when it comes to resourcing deliberations. GPC, on the other hand, is clearly viewed as a top national security priority, and departments and agencies are adjusting guidance to reflect this. Thus far, however, this has not translated into a coherent global strategy that incorporates the benefits and tradeoffs associated with resource allocation. Rather, particularly in the case of DoD, the emphasis on GPC has largely translated to increased focus on

the immediate regions of adversaries, often at the expense of other geographic areas. While not indefensible in principle, there is little evidence that this has come as the result of a comprehensive strategic deliberation on how best to allocate resources to confront GPC. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, such a posture is at odds with the demonstrable evidence that adversaries, especially China, are becoming more assertive in their pursuit of strategic objectives in the Western Hemisphere.

At the regional level, U.S. stakeholders will need to continue to ensure that their collective efforts cohere to make the most of limited resources and prepare to put more to use should they become available. Importantly, there is a subtle but important difference between coordination at a more operational and tactical level (e.g., ensuring that programs are complementary, avoiding duplication) and collectively contributing to a coherent strategy. Evidence suggests that U.S. stakeholders covering LAC are proficient at the former but may have work to do on the latter, particularly in the context of GPC. As a LAC SME with experience in government conveyed, “It’s not so much about coordination. . . . It’s about coherence. If you have a little bit more funding in the key places and a little bit more coherence, I think you can make some pretty big strides”; such a program, however, “never seems to quite get done.”⁶²⁸ An important part of this deliberation will be an assessment of current authorities and the degree to which they are linked to funding and enable agencies to pursue objectives closely aligned with strategic concepts.

U.S. Resourcing to Latin American and Caribbean Countries Is Comparatively Limited, but Can Still Be Effective

While improved strategic clarity surrounding the prioritization of TCOs and a global effort on engaging in GPC would place U.S. stakeholders covering LAC in a better position to compete for resources, it is important to note that from a comparative standpoint U.S. national security resourcing is limited in LAC. With an overall budget request of \$1.25 billion for FY22, SOUTHCOM is set to receive substantially less than any other GCC.⁶²⁹ Moreover, from FY18 through its FY22 budget request, the average annual amount of State’s International Security Assistance budget allocated to the Western Hemisphere has been just over 5 percent (though some additional funds were likely provided via centrally managed accounts). With understanding and acknowledgment that the agencies making global resourcing allocations have a host of competing priorities to balance in their respective deliberations processes, the combination of the evolving threats posed by TCOs and increased assertiveness by U.S. competitors in the region warrants a reconsideration of how these national security concerns are evaluated.

⁶²⁸ Interview with U.S. SME of Latin American studies, April 29, 2021.

⁶²⁹ For example, the FY22 requests for deterrence initiatives focused on Europe and the Pacific are for \$3.7 billion and \$5.1 billion, respectively, and reflect only a portion of the budget allocated to U.S. European Command and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Among respondents, there was general acceptance that LAC will continue to serve as an “economy of force” in comparison to other regions where threats are more pronounced. Yet while research suggests that LAC remains a secondary region of priority among adversaries, it is clear that recent trends demonstrate that their activities and investments have increased and are growing more contentious. Further, LAC represents a unique opportunity to leverage American strengths to at least slow, albeit not reverse, clear adversarial trends. There is a pervasive sentiment that strategic effects can be achieved with comparatively modest resource commitments. In particular, the ability to provide small amounts of military-to-military assistance to help partner nation counterparts address a pressing need and expanding IMET offerings provide two immediate ways to confront the growing assertiveness of adversaries in the region.

There is also growing concern that persistent staffing cuts at NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM and the requirement to provide justification for an increasing proportion of resources allocated at the GCC level is combining to provide significant pressure on their staffs even as mission sets and expectations increase. The provision of a base amount of annual funding and access to personnel to support security cooperation activities would provide short-term relief. Additional efficiencies could also be identified by conducting a reassessment of current authorities and personnel requirements and the degree to which the resources devoted to them are aligned with evolving strategic priorities, in particular GPC.

Findings

Our fundamental finding, which guides the rest of the analysis, is that U.S. strategic guidance has gaps with regard to the two most prominent, interrelated threats to U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere: TCOs and GPC. While guidance on what constitutes a TCO is catching up with their prevalence on the ground, the various ways they threaten U.S. interests and how they should be prioritized has not yet been articulated. As a result, significant resources are currently devoted to counternarcotics efforts; while narcotics trafficking is a significant component of TCO activities, it is not the only one that needs to be targeted. Additionally, thinking narrowly about TCOs obscures the ways they provide global adversaries with an additional conduit through which they can contest U.S. national security interests in the region.

On the other hand, national-level messaging has clearly articulated GPC as a strategic priority, but guidance on how best to implement measures on a global level is limited. Regions in the immediate vicinity of adversaries are being prioritized, while other regions, such as Latin America, continue to face the prospect of continued cuts. This despite clear evidence that identified adversaries, especially China, have increased their investments and activities in the region.

We also noted that GPC is not a single form of competition, and global competition with China is qualitatively and quantitatively different than competition with Russia and Iran.

Moscow and Tehran remain very opportunistic and highly dependent on political contingencies for government-to-government engagements (e.g., anti-U.S. governments assuming power) and illicit networks/ungoverned spaces. While political, military, and economic incursions by Russia and Iran are problematic for select U.S. interests, they are still relatively limited in scope and scale. This may suggest a lack of a comprehensive regional/global plans, a lack of resources to engage with the region, a lower prioritization of the region, and/or an inability to engage with traditional U.S. partners.

Conversely, although LAC is on the periphery of China's core interests, Beijing is implementing comprehensive, large-scale, and multidomain (diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and cultural) global plans that include LAC as an increasingly important component. China more successfully shapes the environment to set conditions for engagements and pursuing their interests than Russia or Iran. China demonstrates the ability to coordinate across tools of power and at every level of government and industry, including very local levels. It engages and has growing influence within traditional U.S. partner nations and its potential commitments are highly enticing to them.

Just as CCMDs use their security cooperation activities in LAC to achieve access and influence, adversaries engage in information operations and pursue network effects of shared content across state-operated/owned or state-controlled channels and websites such as Xinhua, RT, Sputnik, HispanTV, and then into LAC broadcasters such as TeleSUR. These activities are not done in a vacuum, as adversaries share some content (e.g., anti-U.S.), which is more likely to gain traction, while other content is more adversary-specific and shared less. Adversary governments also coordinate information operations with other forms of engagement to achieve multiplier effects, generally with very low costs and a high return on investment. In sum, these pose a significant challenge, and we are unsure what the alternatives are to a combined anti-U.S. network. Official U.S. messaging is good but will not compete directly unless alternative regional and local networks also used.

The PRC emphasizes relationship-building at all levels, which gains it access and influence in the short term while also promoting lasting long-term investment. Competition for regional perceptions of local and senior officials and industry leaders is conducted via PME exchanges, journalism/governance exchanges, and education/cultural trips to China, but even informal relationship-building and -maintaining (e.g., via virtual outreach) can develop expectations of reciprocation in addition to promoting anti-U.S. narratives.

All adversaries have outreach to local levels via culture and language institutes, but it is unclear how successful these initiatives are compared with media and information operations approaches. Institutes may provide gateways and excuses for inserting foreign personnel into LAC, but probably do not shape public opinion to the same degree that media and online campaigns do. The United States might not need to compete directly with all language/culture centers if media response were broader and more effective.

From the U.S. perspective, multilevel engagements are self-reinforcing: Publics with pro-U.S. image *and* good democratic systems are more likely to vote in pro-U.S. governments (decreases opportunities for adversaries), and pro-U.S. governments open greater opportunities for U.S. local-level engagements.

Regarding authorities, changes made to Title 10 security cooperation authorities in the FY17 NDAA are largely seen as necessary and appear to have improved interagency coordination efforts. Nevertheless, gaps and unintended consequences remain. The security cooperation resource allocation process remains very time-consuming and bureaucratic, and even the new authorities do not explicitly address strategic evolution to prioritizing GPC. Specifically, new Section 333 authorities do not promote long-term planning for building capabilities to counter malign influence. One particular hurdle is the way a partner's "wealthy nation status" limits the degree to which NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM can engage with them.

On the positive side, interagency coordination efforts regarding security cooperation and security assistance priorities appear to have been improved by the streamlining of Title 10 funds into the Section 333 authority in FY17. As a result, DoD and State representatives are better positioned to identify the appropriate authority to utilize to achieve a desired end state and to align priorities with five-year country plans.

Other specific areas suffer from chronic shortages and fluctuations in resourcing. Exercise funding is one such area, largely because associated authorities, such as Titles 321, 322, and 331, do not have dedicated lines of funding and must largely be pulled from limited O&M funds. OHDACA authorities have their own quirks, such as the inability to provide direct assistance to a partner nation's military. Providing the combatant commander with the ability to assist partner-nation militaries with small amounts of direct assistance to help address an immediate need would have outsized impact on building relationships with counterpart militaries. And not all the gaps fall within Title 10. The most commonly cited Title 22 security assistance shortfall is in IMET, primarily attributable to the comparatively low amount of global funding available. There also appears to be discrepancies between State and DoD officials as to the absorptive capacity of partner nations, how this is determined, and the long-term positive effects these programs offer in the context of GPC.

A final, significant gap is the provision of permanent and temporary personnel to the CCMDs. The size and perhaps composition of the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM staffs appear insufficient to sustain the level of partner-nation engagement necessary to compete in a GPC context.

Recommendations

At the national and departmental levels, U.S. officials should more comprehensively define TCOs and the ways in which they threaten U.S. interests. This should include the ways in which they both directly and indirectly enhance the ability of geopolitical adversaries to threaten U.S.

interests. This assessment should also provide clearer guidance on how measures to counter TCOs should be prioritized among other threats to U.S. national security.

At the national and departmental levels, clearer guidance should be provided with regard to implementing GPC at the operational level. While current DoD programs assign and allocate forces to the CCMDs, these decisions currently are done without an overarching GPC strategy. The department should review how missions and activities currently undertaken contribute to GPC objectives, as well as any new or additional measures that are more specific to GPC. Such a review will better focus resourcing deliberations among stakeholder departments and agencies. Current activities and mission sets should also be reviewed at the GCC and bureau level in the context of GPC to help identify specifically whether, and the extent to which, they can contribute to pursuing these objectives and to identify opportunities for new or additional activities that warrant consideration. As part of this, officials should consider ways that the GCCs and bureaus can enhance their ability to be more proactive in their measures.

Appropriate representatives from Congress and DoD should collaborate on a comprehensive review of current authorities that regulate GCC funding for partner-nation engagement, particularly those tied to security cooperation and humanitarian and related assistance, in the context of renewed adversarial activities in the competition space. This should include revising legacy authorities, such as those pertaining to counternarcotics, if they are leading GCCs to pursue resources to satisfy current priorities via indirect methods and addressing any identified imbalances. Congress and DoD should also consider ways to make annual resourcing levels both more predictable, such as by establishing a baseline amount of funding and access to rotational forces, and more responsive. For example, granting GCC leadership with access to small amounts of funding that can be used in a flexible manner to assist a partner-nation counterpart with an immediate requirement, without compromising current protocols regarding human rights and the prevention of illicit activities.

Finally, regarding the personnel requirements of the GCCs, stakeholders within DoD should review any updates to GCC personnel requirements to improve their effectiveness at executing their respective missions in the context of GPC. As part of this, officials should review current billets tied to a particular mission set to ensure they are still required at current levels and/or could be made more flexible to address evolving requirements and priorities. At the operational level, the provision of rotational forces to NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM should be considered, as this would both help address current gaps and provide flexibility to address unforeseen delays or other contingencies.

Appendix A. Pertinent Language of Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, Section 1265

SEC. 1265. WESTERN HEMISPHERE RESOURCE ASSESSMENT. (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense shall seek to enter into a contract with an independent, non-governmental institute described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, and exempt from tax under section 501(a) of such Code, that has recognized credentials and expertise in national security and military affairs to conduct an accounting of and an assessment of the sufficiency of resources available to the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM), Department of State, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to carry out their respective missions in the Western Hemisphere.

(b) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—The assessment described in subsection (a) shall include each of the following: (1) An accounting and description of the funds available to SOUTHCOM, NORTHCOM, the Department of State, and USAID. (2) A list of bilateral and multilateral military training and exercises with allies and partner countries in the Western Hemisphere. (3) A description of the security force activities of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. (4) A description of the activities of the Departments of State and Defense in addressing security challenges in the Western Hemisphere. (5) Cyber domain activities of the United States and those actions in concert with allied and partner countries in the Western Hemisphere. (6) A description of the funding for all international military education and training programs. (7) An overview of all foreign military sales and foreign military financing programs with partner countries in the Western Hemisphere. (8) A list of investments, programs, or partnerships in the Western Hemisphere by China, Iran, Russia, or other adversarial groups or countries that threaten the national security of the United States. (9) Recommendations for actions the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and USAID could take to advance United States national security interests in the Western Hemisphere.

Appendix B. Chinese Economic Programs in the Western Hemisphere

Because some of China's most important strategic objectives and the programs it uses to exert influence are economic in nature, this appendix provides more detailed analysis of Chinese economic and financial activities in LAC.

Trade

China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, sparking a surge in Chinese trade with Latin America, which increased rapidly from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$261 billion by 2013.⁶³⁰ Total trade fell slightly in 2015 (to \$231.1 billion) and 2016 (to \$213.4 billion),⁶³¹ but is now closer to \$314 billion, a 26-fold growth over the past two decades.⁶³² As an indicator of how important Chinese trade is to the region, over 10 percent of all LAC exports now go to China, including over 15 percent of LAC agricultural exports and over 25 percent of LAC extractive exports such as minerals and oil.⁶³³

Another method of quantifying the magnitude of the increase is to look at how an average LAC country's percentage of trade with China has changed with respect to the country's trade with the rest of the world. An analysis of World Bank data from 2006 to 2018 suggests that China's role in LAC economies has sharply risen over recent years, which are reflected in the Figures B.1 and B.2.

In these figures, each dot represents a country's (24 LAC countries included) percentage of exports to or imports from either the United States or China in any given year. The fitted values line represents the best attempt to draw a linear line that reflects the overall trend of the data. The shadows surrounding the lines show the 95 percent confidence interval, which reflects that we are 95 percent confident that this fitted values line has a trend captured within the bounds of the shadow (and not outside the shadow). Here, a larger shadow highlights that we are less certain about the trend of the line than a smaller shadow, which is determined by statistical tests.

⁶³⁰ McDowall, 2014.

⁶³¹ Ellis, 2018, p. 194.

⁶³² Ellis, 2021.

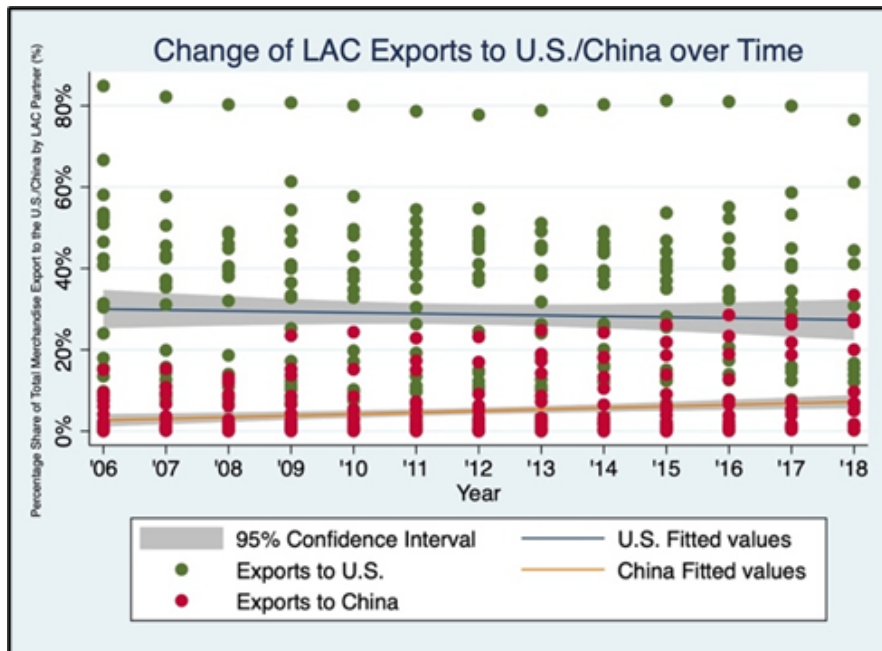
⁶³³ Myers and Ray, 2019.

Figure B.1. Change of Latin American and Caribbean Imports from the United States and China



SOURCE: RAND analysis of World Bank data.

Figure B.2. Change of Latin American and Caribbean Exports to the United States and China



SOURCE: RAND analysis of World Bank data.

In Figures B.1 and B.2, one sees that the percentage shares of LAC exports to and imports from the United States have either decreased slightly or remained level. Given the large confidence interval, these results are not statistically significant, and we cannot say authoritatively one way or the other. Regardless, this understanding is not inherently bad—the United States may still be producing more things faster and more efficiently, but others may be also. Trade is not a zero-sum game, and the United States does not necessarily lose when others gain. However, it is clear in both figures that the percentage shares of LAC exports to and imports from China have risen significantly over the period captured here. Importantly, one sees a very narrow confidence interval for both Chinese fitted values lines, which indicates that we are confident that the trends in that direction or in a direction extremely similar. While the trends of both the percentage share of LAC exports to and imports from China have risen, the trend for the percentage share of LAC imports from China has risen even faster, reflecting the global trend of Chinese goods increasingly dominating foreign markets. Of course, there are many nuances to these data and these conclusions, such as the type of goods that China predominantly exports (low value added) and that each country in the region has a different level of integration in the global economy. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that Chinese trade, particularly Chinese exports to the region, has quickly become an increasingly large part of many countries’ economies in the region.

China’s growing trade relations with Brazil and Chile, two of the biggest markets in the region, exemplify these growing trends. As its largest partner in the region, Brazilian-Chinese trade has grown from “\$1 billion a quarter-century ago to \$76 billion in goods in 2017.”⁶³⁴ As members of BRICS, both countries have regular political engagements, which maintains and strengthens ties. Although it is true that the Bolsonaro government has marked a change in position and rhetoric toward China, experts predict that it is unlikely that China would “want this tension to become the ‘new normal,’” extending past a single administration.⁶³⁵

Additionally, Chile has made significant efforts to strengthen its bilateral economic relationship with China. In 2005, Chile signed a free trade agreement with China, marking the first agreement China had signed with any individual country.⁶³⁶ Since then, Chile has increasingly sought to build stronger economic relations with China,⁶³⁷ including most recently in a 2020 memorandum of understanding on fruit.⁶³⁸ As a symbol of the partnership, the Chinese-Chilean relationship was upgraded in 2017 to a “strategic association,” indicating that

⁶³⁴ Elizabeth Gonzalez, “Explainer: Latin American Countries’ Rising Trade with China,” Americas Society/Council of the Americas, November 29, 2018.

⁶³⁵ Harold Trinkunas, “Testing the Limits of China and Brazil’s Partnership,” Brookings Institution, July 20, 2020.

⁶³⁶ Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, “China-Chile FTA,” webpage, undated.

⁶³⁷ “Decade of ‘Free Trade’ Drives China-Chile Ties,” *South China Morning Post*, September 30, 2015.

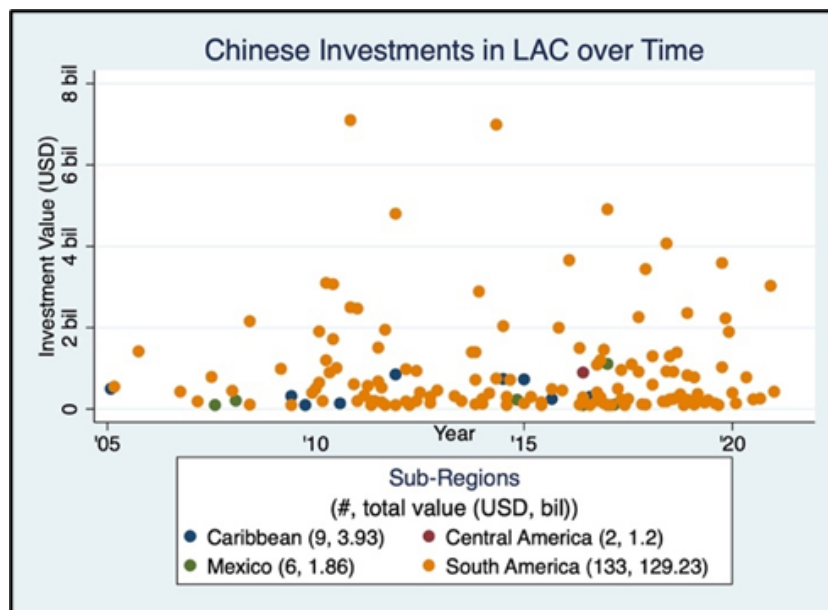
⁶³⁸ Su-Lin Tan, “China-Chile MOU Deepens Trade Ties as Beijing Looks to Cement Relations with ‘Stable Markets,’” *South China Morning Post*, July 24, 2020.

support of the relationship comes from “the highest level.”⁶³⁹ Here, Brazil and Chile serve as examples for the high level of impact and influence China has increasingly enjoyed in major Latin American economies.

Investments, Loans, and Natural Resources Extraction

According to the best publicly available data, Chinese investment in LAC from 2005 through 2020 has totaled at least \$136 billion, through 150 recorded projects. Investments have increased across the region over time as depicted in Figure B.3.

Figure B.3. Chinese Investments in Latin American and Caribbean Countries, 2005–2020



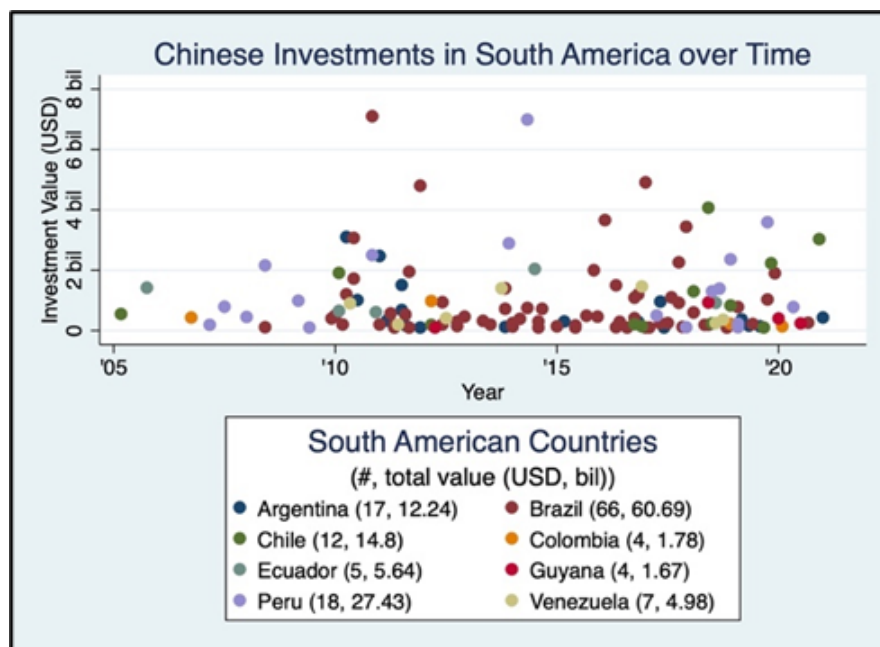
SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, undated.

In terms of number of projects and total value for both investments and construction contracts, South America garnered the overwhelming majority of attention, reflecting the importance of South America versus other subregions vis-à-vis the economy. In these investments, portrayed in Figure B.4, China has strategically invested in a wide array of projects throughout the region in diverse areas like energy, transportation, telecommunications, and

⁶³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, “Vice Minister Edgardo Riveros Led Successful Visit to China with the Purpose of Strengthening the Bilateral Relationship with This Country,” April 21, 2017.

more.⁶⁴⁰ Recent investment projects in the region include oil extraction off the coast of Brazil,⁶⁴¹ an electricity grid in Chile,⁶⁴² and a port in Panama.⁶⁴³

Figure B.4. Chinese investments in South America, 2005–2020



Source: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, undated.

For the past several years, Chinese development finance institutions have been the largest creditor for LAC nations. The China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China (China ExIm) have extended more credit to the region than any of the traditional international multilateral banks.⁶⁴⁴ For a number of countries in the region that have defaulted on past debts (e.g., Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela), international capital markets can be difficult to access or only offer very high interest rates. Chinese loans come “no-strings-attached,” and in some cases have funded incumbent governments’ efforts to gain local support before important elections.⁶⁴⁵ One innovative finance scheme Beijing uses in the region is the commodity-backed loan, whereby Latin American governments agree to provide China with

⁶⁴⁰ Enrique Dussel Peters, Ariel C. Armony, and Shoujun Cui, eds., *Building Development for a New Era: China’s Infrastructure Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Asian Studies Center, Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2018.

⁶⁴¹ Gram Slattery, Marta Nogueira, and Marianna Parraga, “Biggest Brazil Oil Auction Disappoints as Only Petrobras and Chinese Firms Bid,” Reuters, November 6, 2019.

⁶⁴² “China’s State Grid Makes a \$3 Billion Push into Latin America,” Bloomberg, November 13, 2020.

⁶⁴³ “China’s Landbridge Group Acquires Panama’s Largest Port,” *People’s Daily Online*, May 25, 2016.

⁶⁴⁴ Myers and Ray, 2019.

⁶⁴⁵ Jenkins, 2019, p. 246.

large amounts of oil to partly repay loans.⁶⁴⁶ About half of Latin American contracts with Chinese policy banks are commodity-backed, with the majority of these “loans for oil” deals going to large oil producers such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil.⁶⁴⁷

Chinese investment in natural resource extraction is clearly a principal pillar of Chinese external economic policy. From the Caribbean to the Andes, Chinese firms, many supported by Chinese state institutions, have invested in a wide array of industries. Chinese firms have recently acquired significant stakes in offshore oil rigs and refineries (e.g., Guyana⁶⁴⁸ and Venezuela⁶⁴⁹), metals and minerals (e.g., bauxite in Jamaica,⁶⁵⁰ copper and zinc in the Dominican Republic,⁶⁵¹ and lithium in Chile⁶⁵²), and other environmentally damaging resources (e.g., palm oil in Suriname⁶⁵³). Importantly, many of these investments, such as in the lithium mines in Chile, align with Chinese efforts to control access to strategic resources used in advanced technologies.⁶⁵⁴

In addition to benign business deals such as many of those listed above, China has pursued malign economic activity in the region. Experts have documented cases throughout the region where Chinese firms strongarmed countries into bad deals, left construction projects unfinished, and were accused of illegal investment practices.⁶⁵⁵

Furthermore, the Chinese commercial fishing fleet, the world’s largest fishing fleet, with thousands of ships capable of operating thousands of miles from home,⁶⁵⁶ has been particularly daring in illegally raiding the region’s exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Because of overfishing and pollution in its own EEZ, Chinese fishing ships have increasingly had to go farther away to catch fish.⁶⁵⁷ In LAC, there are numerous examples of hundreds of Chinese vessels illegally fishing in the region. In the protected waters of Ecuador’s Galapagos Islands (a UN World Heritage Site), Chinese trawlers turned off their tracking devices to avoid detection while

⁶⁴⁶ Gallagher, 2016, p. 66.

⁶⁴⁷ Gallagher, 2016, p. 74.

⁶⁴⁸ CNOOC, “Guyana,” webpage, undated.

⁶⁴⁹ Mayela Armas and Corina Pons, “Exclusive: Venezuela Wins Grace Period on China Oil-for-Loan Deals, Sources Say,” Reuters, August 12, 2020.

⁶⁵⁰ Caribbean Council, “Chinese Investment in Jamaica and Region Growing,” webpage, undated-a.

⁶⁵¹ Luis González, “Australia y China: minería responsable en RD [Australia and China: Responsible Mining in the Dominican Republic],” *Listin Diario*, January 21, 2019.

⁶⁵² Antonio de la Jara, “Tianqi Buys Stake in Lithium Miner SQM from Nutrien for \$4.1 Billion,” Reuters, December 3, 2018.

⁶⁵³ R. Evan Ellis, “Suriname and the Chinese: Timber, Migration, and Less-Told Stories of Globalization,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer–Fall 2012.

⁶⁵⁴ de la Jara, 2018.

⁶⁵⁵ R. Evan Ellis, “Chinese Engagement in Latin America in the Context of Strategic Competition with the United States,” testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 24, 2020a.

⁶⁵⁶ Ian Urbina, “How China’s Massive Fishing Fleet Is Transforming the World’s Oceans,” *Slate*, September 2, 2020.

⁶⁵⁷ Urbina, 2020.

fishing.⁶⁵⁸ Estimates suggest that Chile loses an estimated \$300 million each year to illegal fishing, primarily from China.⁶⁵⁹ In Argentina, Chinese boats have rammed Coast Guard vessels engaged in counter-illegal fishing operations.⁶⁶⁰ In response to an increase in Chinese illegal fishing in recent years, the governments of Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Argentina—countries that frequently have positive, though not working, relations with China—have all issued alerts identifying Chinese fleets as violating their sovereign waters.⁶⁶¹ This alert, in concert with other countries throughout the world and the history of suspect projects in the region,⁶⁶² paints a clear picture of the willingness of the Chinese state to not only allow but condone malign economic activity in LAC.

Construction Projects

The majority of Chinese FDI has been targeted at oil, gas, minerals, and agricultural products (notably soybean, sugar, and grains) as opposed to new infrastructure. Unlike in Africa, China often lets local and international companies finance and build the related infrastructure in LAC. However, if the infrastructure to find, extract, and ship the commodities Beijing seeks is not sufficient, Chinese companies will invest in necessary infrastructure development as well.⁶⁶³ China has financed efforts to build roads, railroads, refineries, ports, and other facilities throughout Latin America.⁶⁶⁴ The development of industrial capacity and infrastructure investment were prominent features of China's own development strategy and thereby presents LAC governments with one piece of the PRC's model of economic development as well.⁶⁶⁵ Further, related Chinese FDI in CARICOM increased from \$47.6 million in 2005 to \$492.1 million in 2013, an increase largely seen as a response to fill the void left by a drop in U.S. interest and funding.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁵⁸ Tabitha Mallory and Ian Ralby, "Evolution of the Fleet: A Closer Look at the Chinese Fishing Vessels Off the Galapagos," Center for International Maritime Security, October 19, 2020; "Ministro Oswaldo Jarrín dice que más de la mitad de la flota china que está cerca de Galápagos desactivó su ubicación [Minister Oswaldo Jarrín Says That More Than Half of the Chinese Fleet Near the Galapagos Turned Off Their Location]," *El Universo*, August 18, 2020.

⁶⁵⁹ Juan Pablo Toro V., "Pesca ilegal, no declarada y no reglamentada: comprendiendo el problema/construyendo las soluciones [Illegal, Undeclared, and Unregulated Fishing: Understanding the Issue/Building Solutions]," Athena Lab, October 23, 2020.

⁶⁶⁰ "Argentina Calls for Capture of Five Chinese Fishing Boats," Reuters, March 8, 2018.

⁶⁶¹ Alessandro Ford, "Chinese Fishing Fleet Leaves Ecuador, Chile, Peru Scrambling to Respond," *InSight Crime*, November 5, 2020.

⁶⁶² Hannah Summers, "Chinese Fishmeal Plants Leave Fishermen in The Gambia All at Sea," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2019; Jenny Town and Sally Yozell, "Chinese Fishing Near North Korea Is a Symptom of a Bigger Problem," *The Diplomat*, July 31, 2020.

⁶⁶³ Greenwood, 2011.

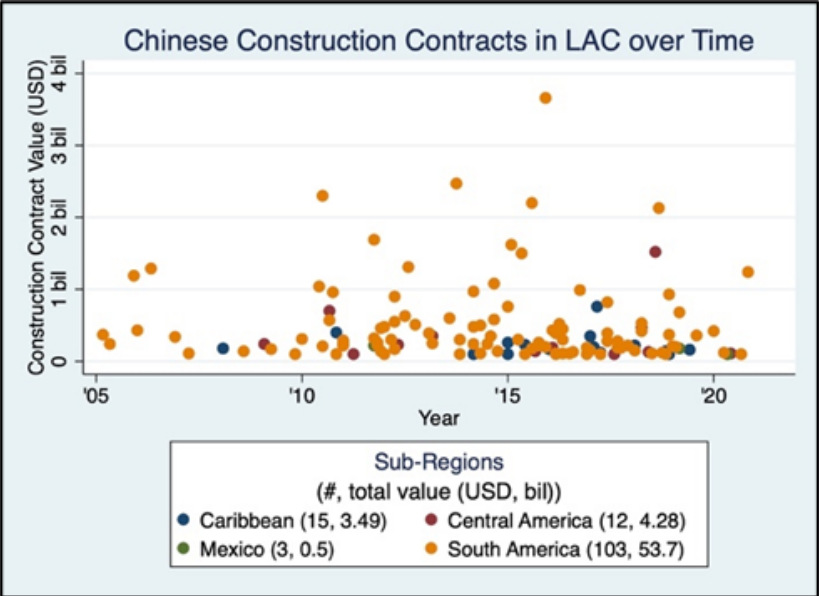
⁶⁶⁴ Sutter, 2021, pp. 291–292.

⁶⁶⁵ Myers and Ray, 2019.

⁶⁶⁶ Causwell, 2020.

Chinese construction contracts in the region were valued at no less than \$61.97 billion, through 133 recorded projects, between 2005 and 2020. Notable construction projects include a \$1 billion renovation of a railroad line in Argentina,⁶⁶⁷ a 1,500-mile transmission line from the Belo Monte Dam to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil,⁶⁶⁸ and a \$730 million highway in Jamaica.⁶⁶⁹ Figure B.5 portrays the value of Chinese construction contracts across LAC, and Figure B.6 shows contracts in the most common South American countries individually.

Figure B.5. Chinese Construction Contracts in Latin American and Caribbean Countries



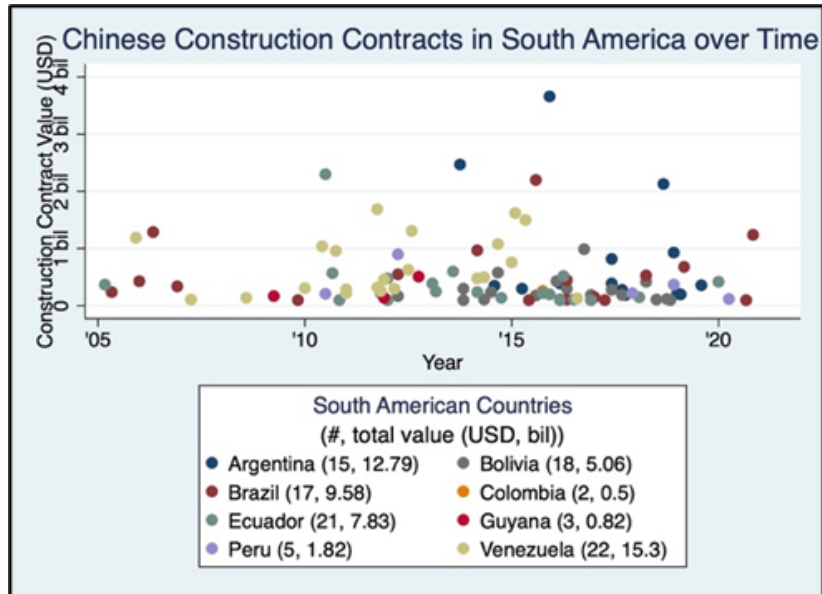
SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, undated.

⁶⁶⁷ Eliana Raszewski and Cassandra Garrison, “Argentina, China Sign Billion-Dollar Cargo Railway Renovation Deal,” Reuters, November 29, 2018.

⁶⁶⁸ Marcelo de Sousa, Diane Jeantet, and Andre Penner, “Brazil’s Amazon Mega-Dam: Broken Promises for Distant Power,” Associated Press, December 18, 2019.

⁶⁶⁹ Caribbean Council, undated-a.

Figure B.6. Chinese Construction Contracts in South American Countries



SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from American Enterprise Institute, undated.

Although Chinese investment in construction projects has strengthened infrastructure in a region that certainly lacked it along with critical financing, there have been significant recent controversies surrounding projects, especially with regard to human rights violations,⁶⁷⁰ environmental damages,⁶⁷¹ and quality.⁶⁷² Data from the China Global Investment Tracker counted 32 Chinese “troubled transactions” in the region since 2007.⁶⁷³ Centrally, these concerns are most exemplified in the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The dam, which became operational in 2016, has faced numerous challenges. Two years after construction, thousands of cracks cover the dam with trees, bushes, and sediment filling the dam’s reservoir, which an Ecuadorian audit blamed on poor construction practices and design; resultantly, it is not capable of running at full power.⁶⁷⁴ Additionally, it is thought that the dam contributed to erosion of the Coca River, which caused two oil spills and the loss of the highest waterfall in Ecuador.⁶⁷⁵ Irrespective of the fact that Ecuador must pay back Chinese investment chiefly in oil

⁶⁷⁰ Colectivo sobre Financiamiento e Inversiones Chinas, Derechos Humanos y Ambiente (CICGHA), “China Commits to the United Nations Human Rights Council to Respect Human Rights in Its Foreign Investments,” March 19, 2019.

⁶⁷¹ Natalia Cote-Muñoz, “China’s Green Investments Won’t Undo Its Environmental Damage to Latin America,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 25, 2019.

⁶⁷² “China’s Dam Builders Crack the Latin American Market,” *Global Construction Review*, February 19, 2014.

⁶⁷³ American Enterprise Institute, undated.

⁶⁷⁴ Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, “It Doesn’t Matter if Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid,” *New York Times*, December 24, 2018.

⁶⁷⁵ Antonio José Paz Cardona, “Massive Erosion Likely Due to Hydropower Dam Causes Oil Spill on Ecuador’s Coca River,” *Mongabay*, May 6, 2020.

and had to slash government spending to support repayment,⁶⁷⁶ the dam is one example of projects that have brought to light serious concerns regarding Chinese investment.

Telecommunications

One area of Chinese investment and increasing influence in LAC of particular interest is telecommunications technologies. U.S. officials have warned LAC governments that adopting Chinese communications technologies would make information sharing and collaboration with the United States more difficult.⁶⁷⁷ Still, Chinese companies Huawei and, to a lesser extent, ZTE have built a substantial presence in LAC. They have constructed “3G and 4G networks for governments and private telecommunications companies, as well as selling telephones and data devices” and have successfully integrated “large local staffs with Chinese managers and technical personnel.”⁶⁷⁸ Huawei is a market leader of mobile devices in the region and a contender for 5G networks in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico⁶⁷⁹ and is “poised to roll out 4G and 5G services to Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago in co-operation with regional telecommunications firm Digicel.”⁶⁸⁰ Chinese suppliers support government and commercial providers such as Telefonica, Claro, and Movistar in building and operating networks, transpacific and transatlantic fiber optic connections, and other new technologies.⁶⁸¹

Many Chinese technologies promise the region real benefits that governments find difficult to turn down. However, the “Smart City” architectures of Huawei, which is alleged to have strong ties to the PLA, introduce surveillance systems, some of which are integrated with Chinese-financed infrastructure programs, that have been reportedly used to surveil and undermine opposition politicians in areas where the technologies have been installed.⁶⁸² Smart City initiatives also provide “a backdoor for the Chinese government to monitor or intercept official information” that the United States seeks to share with LAC partners and gives Beijing “real-time, street-level situational awareness.”⁶⁸³ One senior U.S. official described a case where the partner nation’s minister of defense made a direct request to the United States for assistance in disassembling and disinvesting in the Huawei Smart City program because to excessive Chinese monitoring.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁷⁶ Casey and Krauss, 2018.

⁶⁷⁷ Berg and Brands, 2021.

⁶⁷⁸ Ellis, 2018, p. 203.

⁶⁷⁹ Berg and Brands, 2021.

⁶⁸⁰ Causwell, 2020.

⁶⁸¹ Ellis, 2021.

⁶⁸² Causwell, 2020.

⁶⁸³ Faller, 2020.

⁶⁸⁴ Interview with senior U.S. official, May 26, 2021.

Additionally, in the Caribbean, China has reportedly used mobile phone networks as part of an espionage campaign targeting U.S. mobile phone subscribers.⁶⁸⁵ The telecom technologies also provide a mutually reinforcing dynamic for the PRC by linking surveillance technologies to user financial data and other sensitive information. Collectively, these activities are connected to what is referred to as Beijing’s “digital silk road” using e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba and Tencent.⁶⁸⁶

Overall, LAC officials have reportedly shown little concern over the security problems associated with Chinese technologies entering their countries. As one expert noted, there’s a regional expectation that “if it’s not China spying and surveilling users, then it will be another country’s companies doing the same thing,” and Huawei’s pricing structure is undeniably attractive to LAC officials and markets.⁶⁸⁷ Without a reasonable U.S. alternative, countries seeking to develop their telecommunications infrastructure with 5G networks have little choice but to accept Chinese companies.⁶⁸⁸

Belt and Road Initiative

Many of China’s economic and financial methods and approaches to the region will increasingly be considered in the context of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is an ambitious global investment and trade program designed to strengthen Chinese economic engagement with developing economies while advancing its political and strategic goals. East Asia has received a large share of initial Chinese investments in the project. Further, the Middle East was initially said to be at the center of the BRI, and Africa and Latin America were along the periphery of the initiative, but eventually the BRI scope will include the entire LAC region.⁶⁸⁹ As depicted in Figure B.7, South America has received Chinese BRI investments nearly on par with or greater than a number of other regions in recent years.

⁶⁸⁵ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, “Revealed: China Suspected of Spying on Americans Via Caribbean Phone Networks,” *The Guardian*, December 15, 2020.

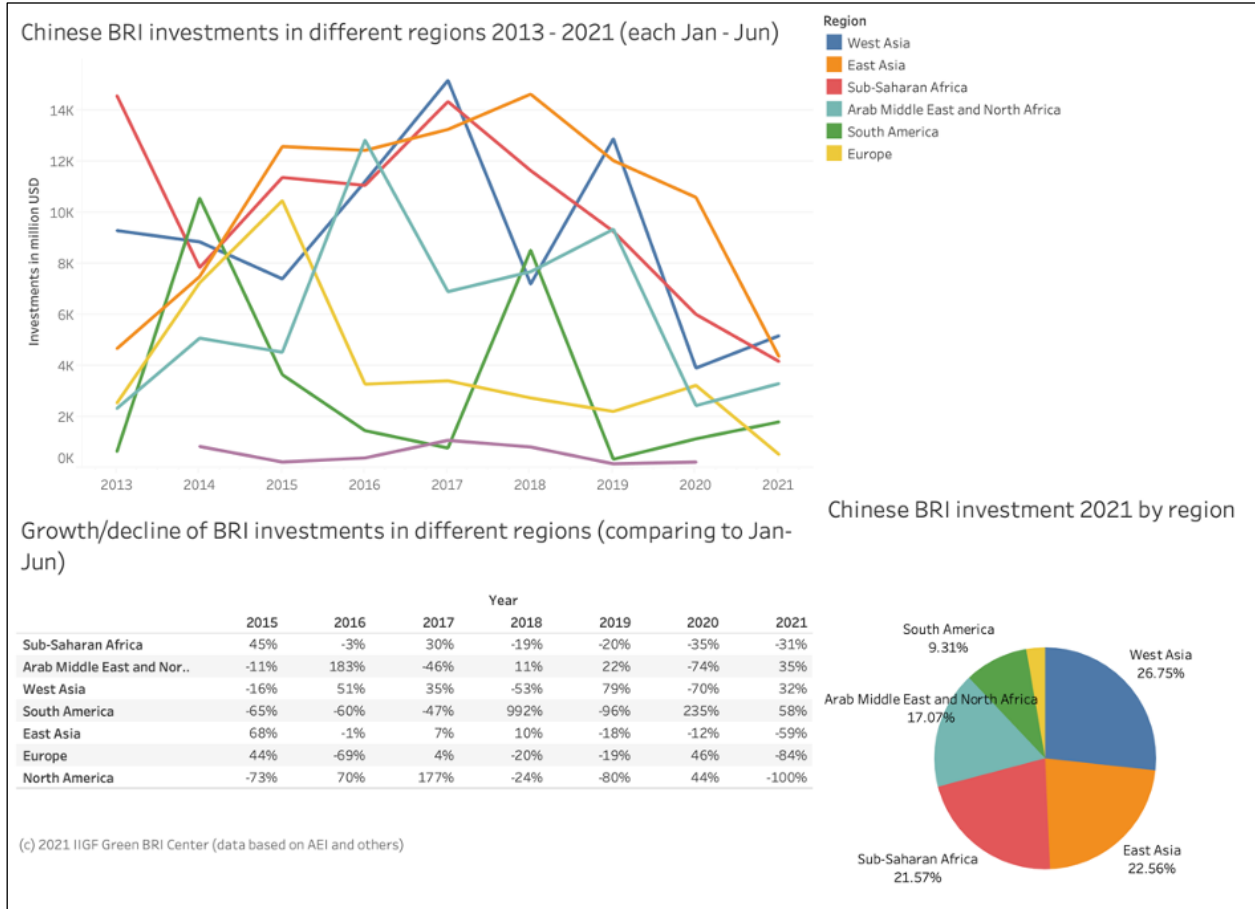
⁶⁸⁶ Ellis, 2021.

⁶⁸⁷ Interview with U.S. SME on Chinese affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean, May 4, 2021.

⁶⁸⁸ Interview with senior U.S. official, April 1, 2021.

⁶⁸⁹ Sutter, 2021, p. 270.

Figure B.7. Chinese Belt and Road Initiative Investments, by Region



SOURCE: Christoph Nedopil Wang, *China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report H1 2021*, Beijing: International Institute of Green Finance, Central University of Finance and Economics, July 27, 2021. Used with permission.

In 2016, no country in the hemisphere was officially part of China’s BRI. In rapid succession, three years later, 17 countries throughout the region (more than half) had joined the BRI. In the case of Panama and the Dominican Republic, the deals were explicitly linked to ending relations with Taiwan and recognizing the One China principle. Notably, no countries joined the BRI since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the region’s four biggest economies (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia) have not joined the program, reflecting China’s targeting of weaker economies as well as other factors, such as political considerations, rising Chinese economic power may make not being in the program untenable for all countries attempting to rebound from the financial costs of the pandemic.

There are now 19 LAC countries officially part of programs tied directly to the BRI that, in addition to infrastructure funding, offers billions of dollars in “no strings attached” loans, donations of military equipment, and other security related engagements.⁶⁹⁰ To clarify that the

⁶⁹⁰ Faller, 2020.

BRI is intended to extend beyond civilian trade and finance arrangements, in 2019 the Chinese state councilor and Minister of National Defense, General Wei Fenghe, suggested the BRI could serve as a “framework” to “deepen military exchanges and cooperation with the Caribbean countries.”⁶⁹¹

Economic Diplomacy and Coercion

China has sought to expand its global influence primarily, although not solely, by building long-term economic relationships. In addition to economic objectives, Beijing’s focus on trade also supports its goal of decreasing diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and promoting the multipolar world concept. China not only seeks economic relations with countries not ideologically aligned with the United States, such as the Bolivarian bloc of ALBA nations, but engages with economies throughout the region, including key U.S. allies. For example, the PRC provided large amounts of aid and investment promises to Panama, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador in recent years, all of which subsequently dropped their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.⁶⁹²

The American policy of “dollar diplomacy” was the idea of providing financial aid to foreign governments to promote U.S. commercial and political interests that began early in the 20th century under President William Howard Taft. That policy has been said to have been replaced with “yuan diplomacy.” Even international finance bodies such as the World Bank and the IDB were surpassed by Chinese development banks as early as 2014 in terms of total finance provided to Latin American governments,⁶⁹³ making China the top source of development finance in LAC.⁶⁹⁴ Yuan diplomacy, along with other methods, has probably helped explain the increase in Latin American opinion polls that show perceptions that China is becoming increasingly influential across the region and that it has a more positive influence on the region than the United States.⁶⁹⁵

China’s economic diplomacy over the past two decades has also left many LAC countries heavily reliant on continuing Chinese economic relationships. Since 2010, China has been the top export destination for South American goods, LAC’s second most important trading partner overall, and second most important source of mergers and acquisitions and FDI.⁶⁹⁶ Critics of China’s economic diplomacy point to examples or the potential for China to leverage its economic importance over a nation’s government to dictate political or economic decisions made

⁶⁹¹ Causwell, 2020.

⁶⁹² Farah and Babineau, 2019.

⁶⁹³ Gallagher, 2016, p. 65.

⁶⁹⁴ Myers and Ray, 2019.

⁶⁹⁵ Gallagher, 2016, p. 66.

⁶⁹⁶ Myers and Ray, 2019.

by that government. This form of “debt trap diplomacy” has not occurred often in LAC yet, but the example in Sri Lanka is often pointed to when highlighting the dangers it poses. In that case, “Sri Lanka’s default on Chinese debt gave Chinese creditors considerable equity in the strategically important Hambantota Port.”⁶⁹⁷

PRC officials and Chinese companies and banks appeal to foreign governments’ and business leaders’ short-term interests with seemingly benign economic incentives. However, these overtures are coordinated across sectors and in combination with other forms of statecraft that have outsized effects on regional and international institutions, security, freedom, and prosperity.⁶⁹⁸

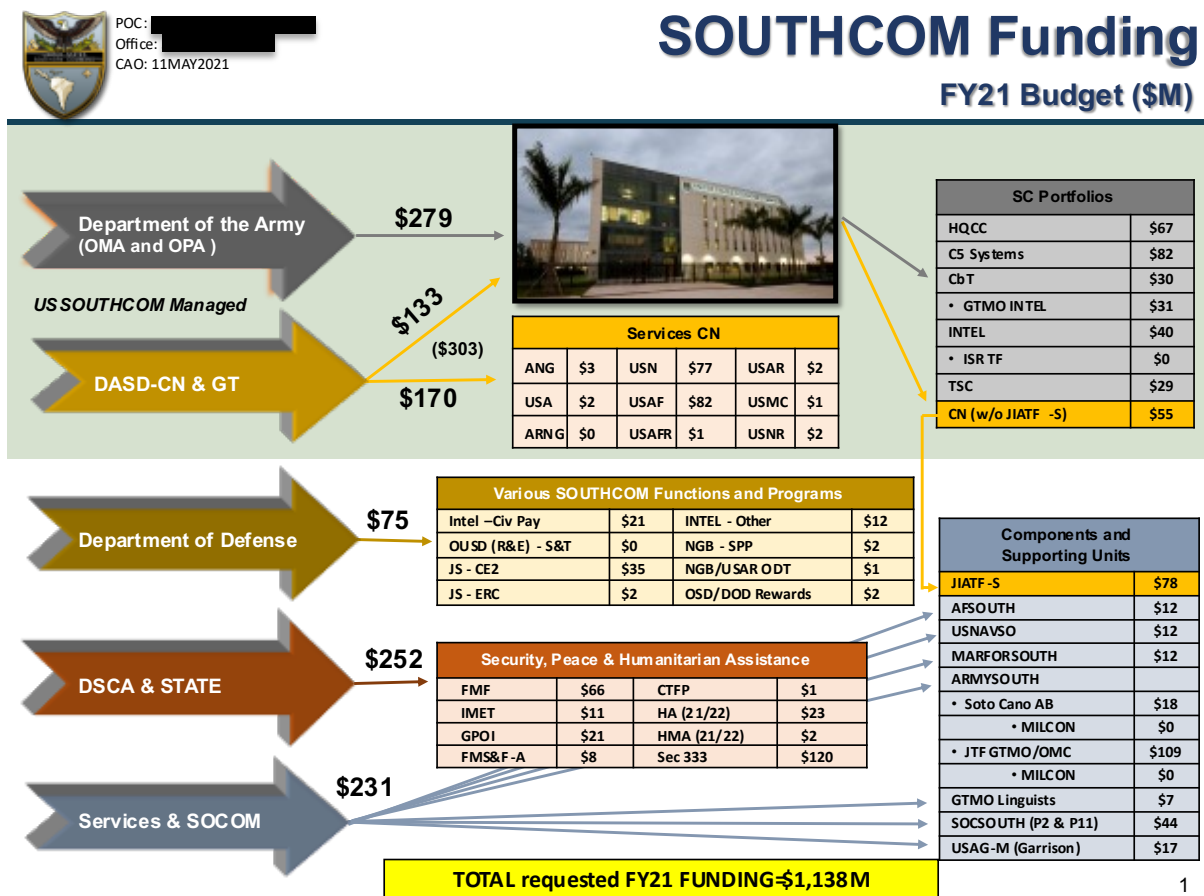
⁶⁹⁷ Myers and Ray, 2019.

⁶⁹⁸ Ellis, 2021.

Appendix C. Example of SOUTHCOM Enterprise Funding Budget Slide

As stated in the main body of this report, DoD does not release comprehensive budget data for GCCs. Thus, the primary source for the references to SOUTHCOM funding levels in this report is data provided to the RAND project team by SOUTHCOM staff. Figure C.1 is a representative example of the format in which comprehensive data was conveyed for FY18–22. The majority of the references germane to this report come from the “DSCA and State” category.

Figure C.1. U.S. Southern Command Enterprise Funding Slide, FY21



SOURCE: Slide provided by SOUTHCOM.
NOTE: Slight discrepancies in totals likely due to rounding issues.

Appendix D. Other U.S. Agencies with Complementary Programs Supporting National Security in the Western Hemisphere

As one would expect, any threat significant to receive strategic attention from State and DoD should also be on the list of priorities for other departments and agencies with international activities—which is virtually all of them. While a detailed examination of these other activities goes beyond this report’s mandate, several are important enough to merit discussion here. None have the direct focus on GPC that characterize defense and diplomatic approaches, but most are compatible with the line of reasoning that helping the hemisphere’s states deal with their socio-economic and political issues establishes the United States as a trusted partner and makes the region less vulnerable to penetration by both rival powers and extra-hemispheric “bad actors.” In this context, it is important to note that, unlike for other parts of the world, there is no formal, high-level, interagency, national strategy for Latin America.⁶⁹⁹

U.S. Coast Guard

As noted above, one of SOUTHCOM’s closest interagency partners is the USCG. The USCG has its own regional activities, which run the gamut from staff-focused activities to live exercises, such as the following:

- North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI), a collaboration with the Canadian and Mexican navies that includes annual exercises in the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Mexico.
- UNITAS, a South American/U.S. exercise focused on command and interoperability within a multinational operation.⁷⁰⁰
- Visits by mobile training and technical assistance teams under the Coast Guard International Training Division. Globally, this amounts to approximately 2,500 international students in 60 countries.
- “Enactments” covered by the 34 bilateral agreements and operational procedures maintained by the Coast Guard. This was done 192 times in FY 2019, with Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Colombia as the leading partners.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ Contrast this with Africa, for example, where the U.S. has identified four strategic “pillars”: (1) strengthen democratic institutions, (2) spur economic growth, trade, and investment, (3) advance peace and security; and (4) promote opportunity and development (The White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, Washington, D.C., June 2012).

⁷⁰⁰ Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, and U.S. Coast Guard, Office of the Commandant, *The National Fleet Plan*, August 2015, pp. 17–19.

⁷⁰¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Under Secretary for Management, *Counter-Drug Operations: Fiscal Year 2020 Report to Congress*, August 14, 2020, p. 6.

Customs and Border Protection

Customs and Border Protection is typical of this second tier of foreign policy agencies. While Customs and Border Protection focuses on the near approaches to U.S. territory, it also has a presence in selected foreign capitals and other major cities, from which it promotes bilateral relations and programs to influence the flow of goods and people farther from U.S. shores. In organizational parlance, this is described as “maximiz(ing) the access and placement of its capabilities in strategic locations to address the threats [transnational criminal] networks pose to the country.”⁷⁰²

In its public documents, Customs and Border Protection speaks in general terms of this approach, noting the tension between these partnerships with other law enforcement agencies against terrorists, transnational criminal organizations, and their affiliated networks, with the national objective of facilitating lawful trade and travel.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Like Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement maintains a footprint in Latin America, with full attachés (GS-15) in Mexico City, Panama City, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, and Brasilia. Assistant attachés are present in nine other capitals, and in five cities in northern Mexico. The International Operations Division of the Homeland Security Investigations branch “develops and supports investigations, initiatives and operations conducted or supported by HSI attaché offices and builds relationships with foreign law enforcement partners to support domestic cases, combat transnational criminal organizations and prevent terrorist activities.”⁷⁰³

The range of activities conducted by these attachés can be understood by looking at one of the more prominent ones, that in Bogotá. The embassy’s webpage describes some of the ICE Attaché’s responsibilities as follows:

- Coordinating the criminal and administrative investigations into violations of United States immigration and customs laws with our counterparts in Colombia;
- Assisting our foreign counterparts with investigations that have ties to the United States;
- Assisting in the repatriation of nationals of Colombia who have been ordered deported or removed from the United States;
- Working with the Department of State in Colombia to identify visa fraud and coordinating appropriate criminal prosecution with the host country when it is detected;
- Working with Colombian Officials to identify Trade Based Money Laundering;

⁷⁰² U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Global Engagement Strategy*, CBP Publication 05420716, July 2016, p. 3.

⁷⁰³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Homeland Security Investigations: International Operations,” webpage, undated.

- Providing outreach and training to host country officials, businesses, non-governmental organizations, civic groups, industry and others in support of our efforts to combat money laundering, criminal travel, human trafficking and smuggling, child pornography and exploitation, visa and document fraud, customs fraud and other offenses related to the unlawful movement of people, goods, money and technology into or out of the United States.⁷⁰⁴

Behind these generic-sounding bureaucratic tasks, one can find numerous news reports highlighting the output of these efforts. Recent examples include Operation Turbo, which targeted human trafficking;⁷⁰⁵ support for the creation of the Yuliana Andrea Samboni Child Exploitation Lab in Bogotá and the Transnational Cyber Crimes Investigative Laboratory in Cartagena;⁷⁰⁶ and a joint raid with Colombian law enforcement that seized weapons and ammunition destined for a Colombian insurgent group's base in Venezuela.⁷⁰⁷

Drug Enforcement Agency

A final player in U.S. activities to support security and law-enforcement activities in Western Hemisphere partner nations is the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Like DoD, the DEA uses a variety of authorities and funding sources to conduct these activities. Its major distinction among partners is between “Sensitive Investigative Units” (SIUs) and “Non-SIU Vetted Units.” Both are part of a formal program supported by the DEA’s Office of International Impact. The main distinction between the two, according to an audit by the Justice Department’s Inspector General, is that the DEA budgets for the SIU Program and allocates funding to specific units in 15 countries. For the Non-SIU VUs in eight additional countries, no money is set aside, and the DEA generally relies on funding from State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs or DoD.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁴ U.S. Embassy in Colombia, “Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE),” webpage, undated.

⁷⁰⁵ James Walsh, opening remarks at the 30th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice U.S. Side Event on “Operation Turbo: How Migrant-Smugglers-Turned-Killers Were Brought to Justice,” May 17, 2021.

⁷⁰⁶ Kwinten Wouters, “Colombian Police Join Forces with ICE to Fight Child Exploitation,” *Bogotá Post*, February 13, 2018; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “ICE Cartagena Opens Forensic Lab to Combat Transnational Cyber Crime,” September 29, 2020.

⁷⁰⁷ “Seized Guns Destined for Colombia Rebels in Venezuela: Sources,” Reuters, February 3, 2018, updated in February 2021.

⁷⁰⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Headquarters-Based Oversight of Its Supported Foreign Law Enforcement Units (Redacted for Public Release)*, Report 21-109, August 2021, pp. 3–4.

Appendix E. DoD Limitations in Conducting Security Cooperation with Nations Classified as High Income

In May 2017—as required by Section 1241(n) of the FY17 NDAA, and for the purposes of determining partner nations’ eligibility for assistance under security cooperation programs outlined in 10 U.S.C., Chapter 16—Secretary of Defense James Mattis followed the Department of State and USAID in defining a “developing country” as any country assigned a low- or middle-income designation by the World Bank for a given fiscal year.⁷⁰⁹ The World Bank’s income groups for an upcoming fiscal year are updated annually on July 1 using estimates of each country’s gross national income (GNI) per capita from the previous calendar year (CY), and are as follows for FY21.⁷¹⁰

Table E.1. Partner-Nation Eligibility for Assistance Under 10 U.S. Code, Chapter 16, by Gross National Income, FY21

World Bank Income Group	Gross National Income per Capita (CY19)	Eligible for Assistance in FY21
Low	≤ \$1,035	Yes
Lower-middle	\$1,036–\$4,045	Yes
Upper-middle	\$4,046–\$12,535	Yes
High	≥ \$12,536	No

SOURCE: World Bank, “World Bank Country and Lending Groups,” webpage, undated-c.

NOTE: See source for more details regarding World Bank’s “Atlas” method for calculating GNI.

Note that, even if a country loses its “developing country” status from one fiscal year to the next, it will still be permitted to participate in any events or activities that were approved in the previous fiscal year.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ Public Law 114-328, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, December 23, 2016; Theresa Whelan, Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Defense (Policy), “Definition of ‘Developing Country’ for Security Cooperation Programs,” memorandum to Secretaries of the Military Departments; Under Secretaries of Defense; Chief, National Guard Bureau; Commanders of the Combatant Commands; General Counsel of the Department of Defense; Assistant Secretaries of Defense for Policy; Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency; Director, Joint Staff; May 15, 2017.

⁷¹⁰ World Bank, “How Does the World Bank Classify Countries?” webpage, undated. As of FY21, the high-income economies in the SOUTHCOM AOR (excluding non-UN members) are as follows: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Chile, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay; non-UN members include Aruba, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Sint Maarten, U.S. Virgin Islands. The Bahamas also qualifies within the NORTHCOM AOR. At the time of writing, World Bank’s updated list for FY22 includes no changes. References for the above list include “List of High-Income Economies (as of 2021 Fiscal Year),” visual forwarded by U.S. civilian official on June 30, 2021; World Bank, “World Bank Country and Lending Groups,” undated-c.

⁷¹¹ Whelan, 2017.

While high-income (i.e., “developed”) countries can still theoretically receive assistance, they can only do so under the most extenuating of circumstances. For example, officials with delegated authority under 10 U.S.C. §312 may approve a waiver to pay select expenses of personnel for a developed country, but only if they are “necessary for theater security cooperation . . . [are] necessary to response to extraordinary circumstances[,] and [are] in the national security interest of the United States.”⁷¹² As Under Secretary of Defense for Policy John Rood described in a 2019 memorandum, these extraordinary circumstances must be “specific, and/or unique facts applicable to the specific country in question that are truly remarkable” (e.g., unforeseen financial expenses arising from a natural disaster). Waivers must also “articulate how payment of expenses for a particular event or [Foreign Liaison Officer (FLO)] assignment would provide a direct and demonstrative benefit to U.S. military operations, access, and/or influence when the foreign country has demonstrated a willingness to take certain, specific actions favorable to U.S. interests.”⁷¹³ All waivers must undergo legal review by the submitting Component’s legal office, and the official must submit justifications for approvals to DSCA on a quarterly basis.⁷¹⁴ Given this high standard for justification, it is unsurprising that such “waivers are hard to come by.”

⁷¹² John C. Rood, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, “Re-Delegation of Authority for 10 U.S.C. 312—Payment of Personnel Expenses Necessary for Theater Security Cooperation,” memorandum to Secretaries of the Military Departments, Commanders of the Combatant Commands, Directors of the Defense Agencies, pp. 6–8, May 20, 2019. In the memorandum, Rood emphasizes that

This “extraordinary circumstances” waiver authority is not intended to be an exception that swallows the rule. DoD Components must employ the mindset that the payment of expenses for personnel from a developed country is not permitted, instead of the mindset that the waiver authority can be used to “find a way to yes.”

⁷¹³ Rood further illustrates this point via the following example:

It is not sufficient if the justification is that payment of expenses for personnel to attend a conference, seminar, or similar meeting would maintain good relations between the United States and the foreign country in the face of great-power competition. . . . Rather, the justification would need to demonstrate how the payment of expenses is related to a specific action the foreign country has expressed a willingness [sic] take that would be beneficial to the United States against a great-power competitor.

⁷¹⁴ Rood, 2019.

Appendix F. Bi-/Multinational Training and Exercise Missions Carried Out by SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM

Figure F.1 provides a list of bilateral and multilateral training and exercise missions organized and funded by NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM, currently planned to take place in FY21–22.

Table F.1. Bi-/Multinational Training and Exercise Missions Carried Out by SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM, FY21–22

Event Name	Event Type
Dual Participation^a	
TRADEWINDS (21 and 22)	Field training exercise (FTX)/ command post exercise (CPX)
CYBER TRADEWINDS	Tabletop Exercise (TTX)/CPX
PANAMAX	CPX
UNITAS 21	FTX/CPX
FUERZAS COMMANDO	Combined skills exercise
SOUTHCOM	
ANGEL OF THE ANDES	FTX/CPX
CENTAM GUARDIAN (21 & 22)	FTX/CPX
CENTAURO 21	TTX
FORMOSA 21	TTX
FUSED RESPONSE	FTX/CPX
MSAS Belize (2)	Mobile Training Team (MTT)
MSAS Colombia (2)	MTT
MSAS Costa Rica (2)	MTT
MSAS Dominican Republic (2)	MTT
MSAS Ecuador	MTT
MSAS El Salvador	MTT
MSAS Guatemala	MTT
MSAS Peru	MTT
RESOLUTE SENTINEL	FTX
SOUTHERN PARTNERSHIP STATION	FTX
Tactical Medicine Chile	MTT
Tactical Medicine Ecuador	MTT
Tactical Medicine El Salvador	MTT
Tactical Medicine Honduras	MTT
Tactical Medicine Peru	MTT
UNITAS LANT 21 (Ecuador)	FTX
UNITAS 21 (Marine Forces-South/Peru)	FTX
NORTHCOM	
AMALGAM EAGLE	Live fly exercise
JAGUAR STRIKE	CPX
NAMSI PACEX/GOMEX	TTX/FTX
RESTORATION ISLAND CAYS	TTX/CPX/FTX
RESTORATION FAMILY CAYS	TTX/CPX

Event Name	Event Type
FUERZAS AMIGAS	CPX/FTX
CBRN	FTX
JRTC	Company-level rotation
Airborne Exchange	FTX

SOURCE: Data provided by SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM staff, respectively.

^a Refers to exercises hosted by SOUTHCOM that include the participation of Mexico and/or the Bahamas.

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Figure 3.13. Total U.S. Chinese, Iranian, and Russian Diplomatic Posts in Latin American and Caribbean Countries

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For Chinese diplomatic posts, we collected source data from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China diplomatic mission websites, such as those listed at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Consuls General,” undated.

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Sources for Iranian diplomatic posts are cited above, for Figure 3.12.

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Abbreviations

ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (generally translated as the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas)
BID	Banco Internacional de Desarrollo C.A.
BPC	building partner capacity
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARSI	Central American Regional Security Initiative
CBERS	China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite
CBSI	Caribbean Basin Security Initiative
CCMD	combatant command
CCTV	China Central Television
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CN>	Counternarcotics and Global Threats
COCOM	combatant command
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CTA	Central Transfer Account
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque separatist movement)
FAN	National Armed Forces of Venezuela
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	foreign military sales
FY	fiscal year
GCC	geographic combatant command
GDAP	Guidance for the Development of Alliances and Partnerships
GDP	gross domestic product
GPC	great-power competition
GPOI	Global Peace Operations Initiative
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IMET	International Military Education and Training
INCLE	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement
INSSG	Interim National Security Strategic Guidance
IRGC-QF	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force

ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JIATF-South	Joint Interagency Task Force–South
JSSAR	Joint Security Sector Assistance Review
LAAD	Latin American Agribusiness Development
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LCS	littoral combat ship
MRTA	Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement
NADR	Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NORAD-	North American Aerospace Defense Command–U.S. Northern
NORTHCOM	Command
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
OAS	Organization of American States
OHDACA	Overseas Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster, and Civic Aid
O&M	operations and maintenance
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSD-P	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
PCI	Parchin Chemical Industries
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PME	professional military education
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SME	subject-matter expert
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
SPP	State Partnership Program
SSCI	Significant Security Cooperation Initiative
SUCRE	Sistema Unitario de Compensación Regional
TBA	Tri-Border Area
TCA	Traditional Commander’s Activities
TCO	transnational criminal organization
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USAN	Union of South American Nations
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard
VEO	violent extremist organization

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Despite being in the United States’ “neighborhood,” Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has typically not been a priority region for U.S. national security objectives, and in recent decades threats emanating from the region have largely been perceived to be tied to narcotics and other illicit trafficking. This posture may need to be reassessed, especially in light of the increased activities and investments made in the region by adversaries in the context of great-power competition.

In this report, the authors assess the sufficiency of resources available to pursue U.S. national security objectives in LAC, drawing on strategic guidance documents issued at the national and departmental levels, as well as by U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the U.S. State Department, and the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The authors also provide an in-depth review of the goals and objectives of China, Russia, and Iran in the region and the ways in which each adversary is pursuing them.

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