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Sino-American Competition in Latin America and the Caribbean

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SINO-AMERICAN GREAT-POWER COMPETITION

IN

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Anthony Russo Orezzaoli

2020

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Stephen J. Green School of International & Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Anthony Russo Orezzaoli, and entitled Sino-American Great-Power Competition in Latin America and the Caribbean, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University, 2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Ronni M. Orezzaoli and Tara L. Orezzaoli. Without their constant support, guidance and love, I would be lost.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SINO-AMERICAN GREAT-POWER COMPETITION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE
CARIBBEAN

by

Anthony Russo Orezzaoli

Florida International University, 2020

Miami, Florida

Professor Dario Moreno, Major Professor

This thesis explores the ways in which great power competition between China and the United States affects regional dynamics within Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The various theoretical approaches within the study of international relations (IR) (neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, constructivism) are evaluated, followed by a review of foundational works of Robert Koehane, Robert Gilpin, and other IR theorists. Through the analysis and incorporation of these approaches, this monograph seeks to explain an increased Chinese presence in LAC and its impact on the region. By looking through a diplomatic, information, military and economic lens (DIME), this manuscript concludes that a stable pattern of interaction between the two great powers may be attainable, but only under specific considerations. This includes the inclusion of regional elements under a long-term, interdependent future that incorporate a combination of all theoretical approaches, particularly those of neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism.

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I.

INTRODUCTION

U.S.-China great-power competition should be regarded as the most pressing issue in the field of international relations (IR) in the 21st century. How the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) develops over the coming decades will be crucial in shaping the level of stability or insecurity in the international system. Particularly, Beijing and Washington are competing for strategic and regional influence, and for economic dominance in the form of increased access to natural resources, human labor and capital, and emerging markets. Nowhere is this great power competition more pronounced than in key developing regions of the world, such as Africa, the Levant, and Latin America. The re-emergence of great-power competition and U.S.-China strategic rivalry, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), due to its close proximity to the continental United States, has prompted a renewed race likened to the Monroe Doctrine, where the United States sought to limit outside interference in the Western Hemisphere.

Primarily, U.S.-China great-power competition in LAC is carried out through four distinct geostrategic frameworks:

1. Diplomatic Relations
2. Information Access
3. Military Relations
4. Economic Capability

These frameworks, known as DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economics), represent key levers used by the United States and China in their quest for regional dominance. The strategic friction resulting from a resolute United States (seeking to remain the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere) and a rising China (wanting to stifle American hegemony in the region) will inevitably affect U.S.-China relations and amplify its impact on the region.

China's concerted efforts for greater regional control, as seen through a DIME lens, provide a glimpse into how the PRC views its role in LAC, and the inherent conflict that arises from divergent U.S. and China regional interests. It is this confluence of unresolved geopolitical and regional issues, combined with how each superpower chooses to react to the other's actions, that will have the greatest effect on the stability of the region. From a PRC perspective, bellicose action (disguised under the economic instrument of power and other soft power development models) is justified through the implementation of an ambitious foreign policy aimed at disrupting the current U.S.-led regional system. The allure of emerging markets, abundant natural resources, weak governance and political discord, along with Latin America's close proximity to the United States, make the region particularly appealing to China.

The fact that PRC-based companies are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), makes it particularly easy for China to aggressively pursue its self-interests throughout LAC, centered "...around a long-term campaign to reorient global income flows, wealth and institutions so that the value added in its 'win-win' relationship goes increasingly over time to its own companies and people" (Ellis, 2019). As one considers an informed examination of China's intentions in pursuit of its objectives, it is important to note the high level of interconnectedness

and long-term vision which drive its LAC foreign policy strategy. The PRC “...is highly adept in pursuing such goals through the coordinated activities of its bureaucracy, firms and financial institutions, leveraging significant PRC instruments of control over its commercial sector” (Ellis, 2019). Additionally, the CCP’s authoritarian model allows for long-term and strategic planning without being ‘encumbered’ by the democratic political processes that compel the United States and other Western governments. It is the broad application of an aggressive PRC strategy, focused on a long-term, multi-generational value for its people, at the expense of others, that arguably presents a myriad of regional challenges that are worth additional consideration.

It is evident that “At best, China’s economic behavior may enable bad policy choices by Latin American states... at worst, it may represent a concerted strategy by China to achieve political influence in Latin America, challenging or supplanting U.S. hegemony” (Piccone, 2016). It is the implementation of such a concerted PRC strategy, backed by non-transparent agreements and economic predatory practices, that causes concern among U.S. and other Western policy makers. In wanting to lessen China’s unchecked politico-economic influence, Western officials seek to lessen China’s hold on LAC by exposing the incongruity between the PRC’s self-image as a benevolent power and its actions. Should the United States and its allies fail to appropriately react to China's geopolitical offensive throughout LAC, the Western-based Liberal International Order (LIO) set in place after World War II will be adversely affected.

China’s foreign policy strategy in Latin America, viewed through Sino-American great-power competition, seeks to reshape the U.S.-led system of alliances with a system of its own. The PRC’s geopolitical priorities in LAC include securing long-term economic and political

interests; building support for its ‘One-China policy;’ promoting its unique approach to multilateralism; and providing “support to those who oppose U.S. interests, where they do not align with Chinese interests, in an effort to frustrate the United States politically” (Morgus et al., 2019). Specifically, the PRC seeks to circumvent well-established norms and rules of behavior inherent within Western-based structures. By taking a note from the colonialist past of Latin America, China has sought to create its own ‘multilateral’ organizations, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (figure 1 below) and the China Development Bank (CDB), among other PRC-sponsored frameworks, to target extraction of natural resources, secure cheap agricultural imports and high commodity exports, and finance dependence-based, infrastructure loans.

Figure 1: China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)



More broadly, China's unique approach to multilateralism in LAC, as reflected by key initiatives such as BRI and the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum, reflects an affinity to shape the regional discourse without U.S. or Canadian involvement. For both PRC-led multilateral forums and others it may decide to participate in, the overall theme is to 'do just enough to advance its interests,' while appearing to be working well with others. In particular, China's multilateralism is characterized by "... pushing hard on issues it deems in its interest and blocking those that do not, avoiding responsibility for particularly burdensome initiatives, and generally refraining from making grand proposals..." (Morgus et al., 2019). These types of PRC-choreographed, multilateral activities are part of a broader political and economic strategy aimed at expanding its growing influence across the developing world.

Principally, China's strategic aim is to promote a system of regional orders that advance its self-interests while lending support to the preservation of authoritarian regimes and economic dominance over today's U.S.-led, rules-based international order. For the PRC, the current LIO poses a threat because it aligns present-day international relations around "...guiding principles, such as open markets, multilateral institutions, liberal democracy, and leadership by the United States and its allies directly in conflict with its regional ambitions in the Western Hemisphere" (Wikipedia, 2020). It is because of China's focus on controlling regional orders, coupled with U.S. resistance in allowing such a future to occur so close to its borders, that this manuscript's analysis is, likewise, driven by a regional emphasis to Sino-American relations.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACH AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to arrive at a congruent analytical framework for LAC, this paper seeks to uncover the ways in which U.S.-China great-power competition will shape the region for the foreseeable future. Specifically, this research looks at current geopolitical dynamics to provide the necessary theoretical background and identify core issues affecting the region. Reflection on the work of IR theorists, such as Robert Keohane and Robert Gilpin, anchors this research, while the development of an analytical structure based on variations of realism and liberalism frames the challenges and opportunities resulting from the increased U.S.-China great-power competition. In addition to identifying rationalistic perspectives, this research also seeks insight on the importance of post-positivist approaches in IR. Therefore, aspects of constructivism will also be explored, particularly those that emphasize the utility of norms, principles, and values in international regime-building, as well as the relation between power and interests, to include the acquisition of knowledge as crucial to state-actor and societal relationships.

While constructivist tenets will not, in and of themselves, dominate the research, it is important to acknowledge the growing influence that these approaches have on contemporary IR politics, as well as to probe the various critiques that constructivist scholars assert on prevailing state-centric theories. Accordingly, reflections on constructivist theorists, such as Alexander Wendt and Bentley Allan, are explored to uncover inherent theoretical challenges with neorealism and neoliberalism. After deconstructing the various theoretical and analytical frameworks, this paper transitions to considerations for policy makers on how to effectively deal with the dynamic changes in LAC as a result of U.S.-China great-power competition.

This paper posits that the United States and its allies must facilitate a geopolitical future based on tenets of neoliberal institutionalism (among others) to advance shared, democratic interests in the region. Specifically, by recognizing core precepts set forth by Robert Keohane in his book, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, the United States can create stronger political and economic networks among like-minded countries in LAC. Keohane explains that “...hegemony depends on a certain kind of asymmetrical cooperation, which successful hegemons support and maintain” (Keohane, Pg. 49). Therefore, this manuscript calls for the United States and its allies to create an alliance-based, interdependent regional system where cooperating countries can economically and diplomatically pursue shared interests. These types of reciprocal alliances are better adept at highlighting and mitigating the inherent disconnects between the CCP rhetoric and its actions throughout the region, especially in the areas of human rights abuses; one-sided economic practices; and predatory, dependency-based infrastructure development and lending.

Increased regional cooperation and interdependence throughout LAC is not only advantageous, but necessary, as “Rejecting the illusion that cooperation is never valuable in the world political economy...” limits development in the region (Keohane, Pg. 50). Although no singular course of action will curtail the pace of interaction between China and LAC countries, ascribing to a more interdependent future will help set guidelines in place to more effectively manage PRC actions throughout the region. Despite the known risks by participating LAC countries in dealing with China (e.g., financing of one-sided infrastructure development deals; accumulating debt due to unsustainable terms of agreement; domestic de-industrialization due to flooding of Chinese products and services; lack of transparency, etc.), most governments will

continue to do business with China and with their CCP-controlled companies. Therefore, the implementation of an interdependent regional system based on LIO-based multilateral alliances and convergent democratic interests will be critical to provide a counterbalance to ensure that China-controlled companies ‘play by the rules’ and are held accountable for illegal activities.

As one considers the convergence of complex interdependent dynamics throughout the region, it is essential to understand that Robert Keohane's theory highlights a neoliberal international system after hegemony. Although the United States remains the predominant power in the Western Hemisphere, its ‘undisputed’ status as the preeminent hegemon is being challenged by China, as the PRC seeks to aggressively increase its Sino-Latin American links throughout LAC. Of particular interest to the research is whether the PRC’s current soft power and economically-driven strategy in LAC is related to a declining U.S. influence in the region. While the implementation of a Keohanian system should be pursued in the event of U.S. hegemonic loss of influence, since today's international system still aligns closely with those who follow a Gilpinian model of the world, aspects of both Keohanian and Gilpinian models will be considered in the research. Although U.S.-China conflict is not likely for the foreseeable future, the prospect of such a hegemonic system in transition, as it relates to China’s rise in Latin America, is a cause of real concern for the United States and like-minded allies.

Although not yet at the level of unduly hampering core U.S. national security interests, the increased pace of Sino-Latin American interactions has had an effect in influencing certain countries to join China ideologically to challenge the U.S. liberal world order. Specifically, the causal relationship between China’s rise and the level of U.S. hegemony in the region rates

additional consideration. As Robert Gilpin explains in his book, *War and Change in World Politics*, the protracted ‘push-pull’ contest by the United States and China for hegemonic control over the Western Hemisphere is reflected in the type of structure that applies when a hegemonic power dictates the function of the international system. Known as the Hegemonic Stability Theory, it illustrates how a hegemonic power (like the United States) is incentivized to provide economic and political stability to the countries that reside in the system in order to prevent a collapse of the structure. Further, it highlights how the ascension of a rising power (like China) ultimately ends in conflict, and in a new international system. Gilpin argues that “...it is possible to identify recurrent patterns, common elements, and general tendencies in the major turning points in history” (Gilpin, Pg. 3). The ‘rise and fall’ of great powers in the international system is well-supported by historical evidence as the Roman, Spanish, and British Empires, all acting as hegemonic powers, eventually succumbed to systemic pressures, losing their status as hegemons.

It should be re-emphasized that although a conflict-based future is not necessarily on the horizon for the United States and China, being able to internalize Gilpin’s arguments is a useful endeavor, since it exposes the historical pitfalls associated with turning a blind eye to the experiences and recurring patterns of the past. Specifically, Gilpin illuminates the prevalence of a hegemonic cyclical process as being embedded within human history, and thereby inevitable among modern state-actors. Within this context, Gilpin’s main theoretical contribution to IR is that he shines the light on a hegemonic framework that transcends time--applicable just as much today as it was in the past--if prevailing signs are ignored and course corrections are not made. As it relates to the current Sino-American great-power competition in LAC, this manuscript

posits that an all-inclusive, analytical framework that invokes a wide theoretical lens is essential to appropriately view the problem set and arrive at viable considerations for the future.

Interrelated theoretical factors such as historical trends and contributions of prominent IR theorists, to include structural and normative considerations, all aid in the ability to analyze the problem. Of particular interest, as one considers the current hegemonic friction resulting from the pronounced Sino-American strategic rivalry in the region, is the need to ascribe to an interdependent future away from a zero-sum game, conflict-driven scenario. In this respect, policymakers, IR practitioners and contemporary political scientists alike, should not only focus on the inherent structural complexities stemming from the discordant relationship between great powers such as the United States and China, but to also consider other normative and unspecified factors not directly related to the structure. Of additional importance to the research, is to ensure the inclusion of prescribed, theoretical frameworks put forth by past scholars in an effort to align modern perspectives with past theories throughout the analysis.

While the utility of neorealist and neoliberal institutional theoretical frameworks is prevalent throughout this manuscript, it is crucial that constructivist approaches be included as well. As such, policy-makers and IR scholars alike must also acknowledge the usefulness of constructivist approaches in an increasingly interdependent, international system. For Latin America in particular, it is clear that an all-encompassing “Waltzian” perspective on state-to-state interactions is misguided. While the international system is indeed inherently anarchic, Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* notion in there being different types of anarchy shows promise. Specifically, Wendt finds that the “three cultures of anarchy are

dominant - Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian” (Wendt, Pg. 20). The Hobbesian notion of anarchy, which is assumed in various neorealist and neoliberal approaches, dictates that if “...anarchy displays any order in the second, sociological sense it will be because of material forces, not shared ideas, not unlike order in nature” (Wendt, Pg. 252). However, in a complex multipolar system, particularly in a region as interdependent as that of Latin America, it becomes clear that these limiting concerns should be placed in the proper context.

This research postulates that anarchy in the international system more closely follows a Lockean culture, where “...states do recognize each other's sovereignty as a right,” recognizing the primacy of sovereignty, rather than unchecked anarchy (Wendt, Pg. 208). This distinction is crucial when evaluating U.S. and Chinese behavior in LAC, as it leads to the establishment of sovereignty as a norm embedded in global society, recognized by both the United States and China. To take this concept of mutual interests over opposing views a step further, Kantian culture is prominent amongst state-actors as a result of mutual cooperation, in which bonds “...of friendship alert actors as to the interconnectedness of particular interests, which leads to an appreciation of friendship as a norm, legitimate in its own right” (Olivialau.org, 2016). Modern examples of such relationships exist among various countries today, as reflected by established ties between the United States and several European countries (among others) and with those that China seeks to establish throughout LAC. Therefore, the PRC itself will find it useful to develop similar bilateral and sub-regional relationships in an effort to advance its political and economic interests, while aiming to wrestle hegemonic control away from the United States.

The aforementioned constructivist tendencies put forth by Wendt allow the United States and other Western policymakers to perceive the LAC experience through a broader lens. It highlights the non-materialistic parts of the international system and serves as a bedrock from which to develop additional theoretical approaches. An additional factor that constructivism brings to the field of IR is the ability to determine how changes in international orders occur. Bentley Allan's *Scientific Cosmology and International Orders* addresses this concern, where he finds that most theories lack the ability to trace changes in international order effectively. Allan argues that "...cosmological shifts made possible and desirable new ways of thinking about state purpose that came to be embedded in successive international orders" (Allan, Pg. 10). These 'cosmological shifts,' which are defined as "...shifts in the image of the universe and the role of humanity in the cosmos," are responsible for changes in international order, which then become structural forces (Allan, Pg. 4). The notion that changes in knowledge directly affect the decision-making processes of both state and non-state actors is also worth consideration.

In Latin America, the PRC may wish to initiate a process whereby neoliberal, economic ideals put forth by the United States are replaced with a line of thinking which more closely aligns with Chinese interests. Likewise, the United States may seek to keep neoliberal economic tenets embedded within existing Latin America regional structures. Regardless of outcome, this theory recognizes the inherent advantages of scientific and sociological developments as a way to benefit both the United States and China individually and through shared regional interests. One of the main benefits of ascribing to neoliberal economic principles that emphasize the value of free market competition is that it applies to both great powers and to the developing economies of Latin American countries. However, ideas associated with laissez-faire economic

neoliberalism and representative democracy still require stable governance and mutually agreed-upon rules to guide the behavior of participants and guard against rampant corruption.

As this monograph seeks to broaden the theoretical scope of the inquiry, the incorporation of various theories into the analysis will be explored as an essential aspect of the research. Primarily, this work probes into the examination of interrelated geopolitical and complementary IR dynamics to arrive at more inclusive considerations to U.S.-China great power competition and the Latin America experience. Therefore, it is particularly important that a theoretical list include approaches such as those of the English School of International Relations in analyzing Sino-American competition in LAC; namely key theories purported by Hedley Bull and Barry Buzan. Bull's *The Anarchical Society* highlights the key differences between realism, liberalism and constructivism. Specifically, Bull argues that the realist conception of the balance of power is flawed, claiming that it "...should, rather, be understood as a conscious and continuing shared practice in which the actors constantly debate and contest the meaning of the balance of power..." (Bull, 1977). Although Bull recognizes power as the central tenet in international relations, he finds that power also includes a societal role. Normative concepts of prestige, sovereignty and legitimacy all influence the role of power in interstate-relations, thereby limiting the efficacy in which neorealism, in and of itself, is able to explain the international system.

The main contribution made by IR theorists like Bull is that they shine the light on the notion that the international system, due to its multi-layered levels of complexity and inherently interdependent variables, cannot be perceived as simply being materialistic or restricted to a rationalist-based institutional system. Instead, today's interdependent international system,

involving the amalgamation of close linkages among various actors and systems at various stages, must be perceived under a multifaceted lens. Accordingly, it is crucial to acknowledge the “...notion that society is constituted through diverse political practices built around shared, inter-subjective understandings,” rather than resorting to a Hobbesian perspective of international relations (Bull, 1977). In doing so, state-actors and domestic society, NGOs, and other key players within the international system broaden their ideological perspective, and are able to develop national and subnational state priorities that supersede materialistic ambitions and military aspirations into the realm of shared interdependent values and norms.

Additionally, differentiation between international politics and international society should be taken into consideration when analyzing interstate behavior within LAC. Arie Kacowicz, a leading English School theorist, claims that Latin America has undergone a transition from international system to society, arguing that regional norms have been “...both regulative and constitutive, both shaping interests and identities and reflecting them,” leading to the rearrangement of state-actor interests and promoting peaceful interactions between states (Kacowicz, Pg. 12). This evolution closely mirrors Wendt’s understanding of a transition from a Hobbesian system, to one of a Lockean system. Furthermore, this regional perspective also allows theorists and foreign policy-advisors alike to find that “...the rival role identity has come to dominate the structure or culture of Latin American interstate politics,” inferring that Latin American disputes may not arise from rationalist-thinking, but rather from deeply embedded symbolic values attributed to most countries throughout LAC (Thies, 2008). It is the aggregation of these value-based dynamics, which are deep-seated in Latin American society, that call for a more holistic and encompassing analytical approach when looking at the LAC experience.

The historical experience within the Latin America cultural psyche, developed through hundreds of years of colonialism, racism, income inequality, repressive dictatorships, rampant corruption, and dependency on imperialist powers over self-reliance, creates a complex web that transcends a structural state-actor model. As such, U.S. and Chinese policy-makers must take a value-based perspective into account when prescribing foreign-policy moves, acknowledging the growing necessity for normative values in international relations as well. The acceptance of a future that moves beyond the limitations of a purely structural model also provides a foundation for collaborative approaches between great-powers and state actors--with the aim to facilitate a more “harmonic” approach to IR, driven by regional cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Although today’s contemporary dialogue on the interdependent relationship between the United States and China aligns, for the most part, with Gilpinian viewpoints, conflict between the two powers is far from inevitable. Should a system, such as Robert Keohane's neoliberal institutionalism, be in place, China and the United States would be able to come to agreement on how each should behave within the current international system and in the region. Furthermore, having a more interdependent regional system in Latin America will make it harder for any single state actor to garner additional power at a cost to others. Therefore, it is crucial that U.S. and Chinese policy makers utilize all available courses of action to arrive at an agreeable future. Current geopolitical rhetoric too narrowly focuses on Chinese-U.S. relations as a zero-sum game and finds that "...none of these experts predicts a future in which America and China both feel like winners" (The Economist, 2019). However, in order to establish an agreeable future, the United States will need to be more involved with its partners and allies in the region.

Similarly, China will have to transition away from dependence-based predatory economic practices, while working to align its rhetoric and actions. A PRC push “...into positions of greater global power, influence and hegemony... [act as a clear] obstacle to any move toward [U.S.] isolationism” (alfinnextlevel.com, 2016). Thus, a detached United States, categorized by the historic American indifference of the past toward Latin America, only strengthens China's position in the region, no matter how powerful the United States remains in the global stage. Regional alliances and related frameworks that hold great powers accountable for their actions, while promoting multilateralism and cooperation among LAC countries, are seen as the brightest future for the region. Ultimately, China and the United States will need to ascribe to a more neutral position, while still advancing their individual interests, that moves everyone closer to a more interdependent future on matters of mutual benefit.

III. CHINESE-LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN AMBITIONS

Similar to other regions around the world, China endeavors to extend its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere, with a particular emphasis on developing sub-regions. Accordingly, over the past two decades, a prevalent pattern of increased PRC influence has emerged within LAC. Specifically, China has steadily increased its diplomatic, informational, military, and economic presence in the region. Beijing amplifies its access and influence through the use of bilateral trade agreements, predatory economic policies, and military cooperation. At the current pace, many argue that by “By 2050... China may use its growing economic power and technological sophistication to co-opt Latin American business and political elites and give Chinese firms a competitive advantage” (Ellis and Gonzalez, 2019). The growth in China’s “soft

power” engagements reflects a concerted multi-faceted effort to advance its foreign policy agenda through targeted bilateral and regional engagements and strategic partnerships.

Beijing’s diplomatic, informational, military, and economic overtures throughout LAC underpin its long-term strategy to institutionalize its engagements; isolate Taiwan; secure access to raw materials and agricultural goods; partner with Latin American firms to access and develop technology; and secure investment opportunities (Sullivan and Lunn, 2019). From a U.S. perspective, China's expanding influence in the region is a ‘multidimensional strategic challenge’ and a stark reminder of the growing power that Beijing continues to garner. Militarily, organizations like the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), as illustrated in its 2019 Posture Statement (figure 2 below), recognize an impending PRC threat to U.S. national security, emphasizing the importance of strong partnerships to counter malign actor activity.

Figure 2: USSOUTHCOM 2019 Posture Statement



Strategically, the United States seeks to advance its national security interests by fostering peace and security and greater cooperation by leaning “...on the long-standing relationships between the DoD and leaders in regional militaries...” (Mehta, 2019). Yet, to the dismay of many U.S. security professionals, Beijing has effectively secured a foothold in the region by fostering dependency-based diplomatic, cultural, technological, economic, and military ties with most countries in LAC. Similarly, the United States seeks to counter China’s growing influence through a concerted U.S. regional strategy of its own that incorporates a U.S. whole-of-government approach. These geopolitical moves and counter-moves by the United States and China are leading to a super-power race for access and influence, in an effort to win over the hearts and minds of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples.

It is clear that the current ‘single-winner’ security strategies being implemented by the United States and China with regard to LAC are not sustainable over the longer term as they increase geopolitical friction and insecurity. On one end, the United States seeks to maintain the current rules-based international system; while on the other, China strives to disrupt it in favor of its own. Ultimately, China aspires to set in motion a multi-generational, dependency-based strategy aimed at challenging U.S. influence. Though China's ambitions are apparent in every continent, a renewed focus has been given to the growing economies in Latin America.

Accordingly, “Chinese foreign policy emphasizes “soft power” assets, in the form of a ‘global charm offensive’ in an effort to incentivize LAC countries to partner with China” (Harper, 2018). By increasing the region's dependency, the CCP garners political leverage and access. The PRC’s regional focus is intended to enable an interconnected system in which China acts as the ‘Middle

Kingdom,' with all roads leading back to it. It is because of these vastly divergent futures (the United States wanting to maintain the status quo and China wanting to disrupt it), that if left on their current 'conflict-based' trajectory, the United States and China will be forced to reconsider the manner in which they pursue their respective geopolitical strategies in the region.

With an emphasis toward a more convergent future, this paper explores the various ways in which the United States and China can cooperate or, at the very least, compromise on the level and types of activities they can actively engage in. For the United States, it will mean demonstrating regional leadership through increased cooperation and holding corrupt regimes accountable. Specifically, the United States must make a concerted effort to increase the level of collaboration among countries in the region through interdependent mechanisms such as regional alliances and multilateral forums. Additionally, the United States must continue to place particular emphasis on sponsoring cooperative activities that promote a rules-based, regional system to prevent the erosion of democratic principles and young and fragile democracies.

However, the United States must also recognize that LAC countries, in order to fuel their growth, will continue to enter into economic agreements with China due to a lack of sufficient U.S. capital investment in the region. When the United States "...pulls out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, renegotiates NAFTA... and proposes to review remaining trade agreements... it serves as a message that the United States is not interested in promoting economic negotiations in the region" (Farnsworth, 2019). Instead, "...the U.S. should be actively engaging in the emerging markets of Latin America, promoting public-private partnerships, and promoting U.S. technology, companies and services" (Feeley, 2019). Although a move in this direction has

begun, the level and pace of U.S.-led investment in the region must be increased considerably to provide a viable alternative to the dramatic pace of Chinese investment, as well as capital and infrastructure development inflows to the region.

China, for its part, will need to recognize that the United States will want to maintain control over its own region. Therefore, unchecked Chinese influence is viewed as a national security threat for the United States, leading to strategic friction and the likelihood of future conflict between the two great powers. Additionally, China must recognize that it "...cannot do business the way it has in parts of Africa and Asia – intellectual property, environmental and labor laws, along with democracy itself, must be respected" (Winter, 2019). Conversely, the United States must also accept that Chinese engagement throughout LAC will continue. The challenge to the United States will be to find a position of compromise while guarding against the threat of an overly aggressive China so close to its borders. Should the United States and China work on managing their positions, with compromise on mutually beneficial areas, positive development in the region is possible. By utilizing a DIME framework, in which diplomatic, informational, military, and economic levers take center stage, a more complete analysis can be achieved on whether great power cooperation is possible in LAC.

IV. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Diplomatic relations between China and LAC countries have undergone drastic change in the past two decades. The PRC has consistently increased its level of commitment and resources to the region, shaping targeted diplomatic and economic ties with most countries. The ongoing trade war with the United States has further amplified the PRC's diplomatic offensive, driven by

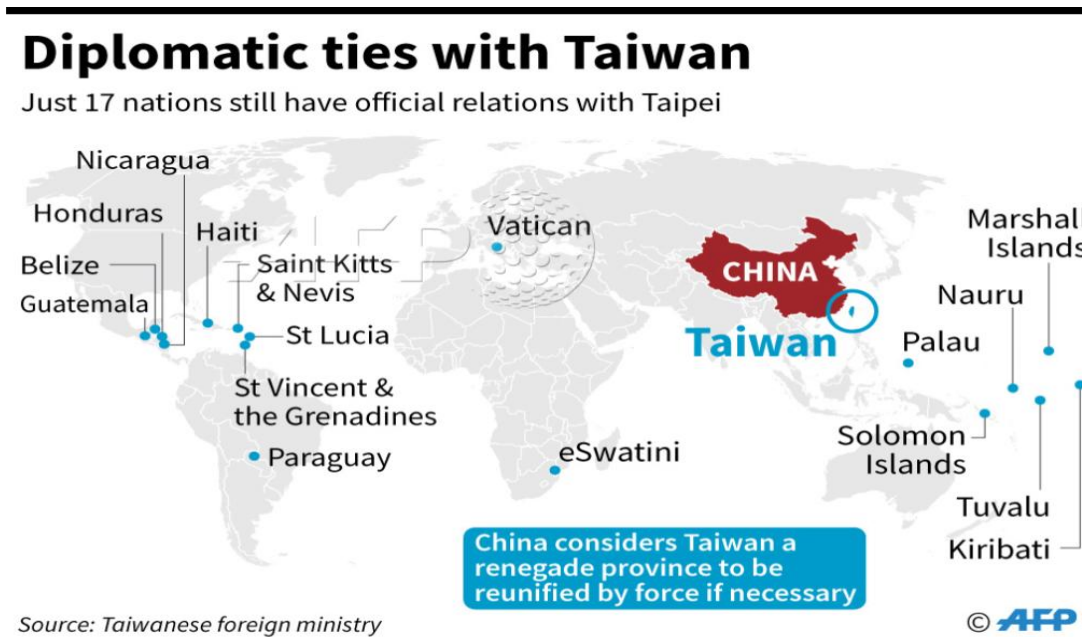
an aggressive campaign to exert political and economic pressure on the region's capitals. The progress made by China to secure access and influence in LAC has been dramatic. Since 2010, China has been the largest investor and trade partner in the region, even surpassing that of the United States. According to the World Economic Forum, since 2010, "China [has] loaned \$65 billion to Venezuela in exchange for oil, \$21 billion to Brazil and approximately \$15 billion to both Argentina and Ecuador" (Harrison et al., 2018). Moreover, China's financial assets and infrastructure investments, in the form of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and international debt securities (among others) through 2005-2018, surpassed over \$1 trillion (American Enterprise Institute, 2018) and \$317 billion respectively (Peters, 2019). China's strategy of interweaving its economic prowess into its foreign policy to gain access and friendly diplomatic relations to its ideology, is seen as a long-term investment to advance its multi-generational strategy.

The increase in diplomatic ties between China and LAC countries is an important soft power lever used by the PRC as a foundational element for its regional strategy. The PRC has actively stated in policy papers that "...China seeks to strengthen cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual benefit in several key areas, including exchanges and dialogues, trade and investment, agriculture, energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, and technological innovation" (crs.gov, 2019). On the surface, Chinese foreign policy actions seem practical and constructivist in nature. The PRC's main 'stated' objective in the region is to be seen as a benign hegemon, working closely with LAC countries through shared principles, values and norms, thereby creating a comprehensive strategy that recognizes both the normative and materialistic factors of the international system. However, this view is counter to a PRC aggressive strategy that seeks to exert economic and diplomatic concessions across the Western hemisphere.

Geopolitically, China seeks to position itself as a successor to U.S. hegemony in the region by establishing closer diplomatic and economic ties with LAC countries. Additionally, China seeks deeper diplomatic engagement with selected state-actors to garner support away from Taiwan.

Historically, most countries in the region have stood closely with the United States and like-minded allies on the contentious issue of China-Taiwan reunification. In recent years, however, several countries in LAC have changed their stance on Taiwan and aligned with China. As part of its strategy to lure Taiwan's allies, China has ratcheted up political and economic pressure to prompt countries to switch sides. The PRC's relentless diplomatic and influence campaign, underpinned by its geopolitical and economic weight, has turned the tide on Taiwan diplomacy. The influence of sought-after Chinese investments, much needed infrastructure development and hefty bribes have proven too much for some LAC governments to resist. For example, as a result of Panama's denouncement of Taiwan, the "...China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC) began building a \$165 million port in Panama for cruise ships..." (Reuters, 2017). It is widely believed that China's 'Checkbook Diplomacy,' targeted at specific countries, is expected to continue. This form of diplomacy has led to the weakening of diplomatic ties between LAC countries and Taiwan (figure 3 below).

Figure 3: Diplomatic Ties with Taiwan



Beijing’s diplomatic strategy for recognition of its ‘One-China policy’ has used entrenched dictatorships, such as those in Nicaragua, as an inroads to other Central American and Caribbean countries. As a result, Costa Rica recently switched its support away from Taiwan in favor of the PRC. Following this change in policy, Costa Rica received “...a \$ 300 million non-reimbursable loan, and the redevelopment of Chinatown in the capital” (Rubio, 2018). The concerted diplomatic influence campaign by China continues to provide the expected results, as other neutral countries, like the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, have also recently changed their position on the issue, siding with the PRC as well. In the meantime, China’s charm offensive in the form of non-reimbursable loans, military equipment gifts, bribes, and other non-transparent government-to-government deals to lure support away from Taiwan continues unabated. The PRC strategy is to ratchet up pressure on the remaining Latin American countries like Honduras, Guatemala and Paraguay, which all still recognize Taiwan.

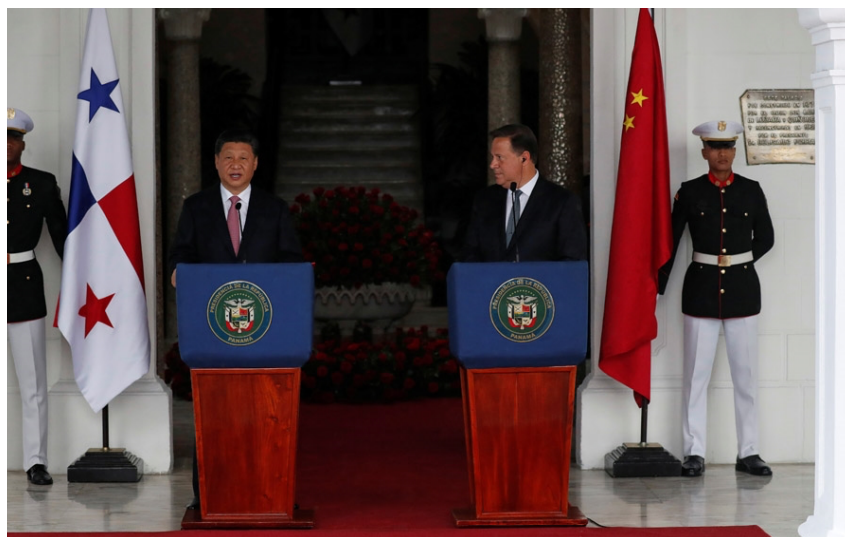
The China-Taiwan tug-of-war is most pronounced with Paraguay, as the sole remaining country in South America that recognizes Taiwan. For its part, Taiwan has increased aid and security cooperation considerably with its only South American ally. On the other side, the PRC continues its ‘all-out’ pressure campaign, with focused efforts aimed at Paraguay’s agribusiness industry. The possibility to export Paraguay beef (their biggest industry) to China (world’s largest consumer), is crucial to a Paraguayan economy teetering on the verge of a recession. As negotiating leverage, China has signaled that it may be willing to open its vast consumer market to Paraguayan beef and soy products. This type of ‘commercial blackmail’ by China has been effective in manipulating the powerful Paraguayan Beef Consortium to put pressure on the government to reassess diplomatic and trade relations with China. As part of its diplomatic ‘carrot-and-stick’ approach, the PRC also takes advantage of the fact that Paraguay’s trade deficit with China is the largest in Latin America. “In 2017, \$3.5 billion worth of Chinese goods entered the country, ...while Paraguay exported a meager \$25 million worth of goods to China” (Youkee, 2019). China’s deliberate actions with countries like Paraguay and other vulnerable LAC nations to exert concessions is representative of China’s ‘checkbook diplomacy’ throughout the region.

China’s diplomatic moves, aimed at advancing its agenda and at any cost are problematic. However, the recent shift in Panama to not recognize Taiwan’s sovereignty is most alarming to U.S. policymakers since the Panama Canal is a crucial hub for trade in Latin America and for international commerce. The fact that China is the second-biggest user of the Panama Canal, supplemented by ‘back-door deals’ to the Panamanian elite, make it hard for the government to resist China’s advances. Additionally, just one month prior to the joint announcement, a Chinese company closed a deal to buy Panama’s biggest port, the Margarita Island Port, for an

undisclosed amount. Just as concerning, is the continued messaging by China to the rest of Latin America, the United States, and the world that it has positioned itself deep into Latin American politics with renewed support from strategically significant countries like Panama.

Often, the PRC has LAC governments heads of state do their bidding for them. In the case of Panama, an orchestrated announcement made by Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela in a November 2017 press conference, shortly after signing a joint agreement on Taiwan, illustrates this dynamic. Referring to their decision to establish ties with China, Varela affirmed, “...our decision would serve as a model for other countries to follow in supporting the One-China Policy... China has amassed political, economic and social power and we are willing to support China in continuing this path” (Wong, 2017). These types of scripted statements by strategically significant countries like Panama message to the rest of the region the relationship between diplomatic ties and the economic rewards that increased Sino-Latin American relations provides.

Figure 4: Xi Jinping’s trip to Panama



President Xi Jinping made an historic trip to Panama in December 2018 after both countries established diplomatic ties a year earlier (File: Carlos Jasso/Reuters)

The picture above (figure 4) between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela illustrates China's diplomatic follow-through with heads of state. After securing diplomatic ties with Panama and away from Taiwan a year earlier, President Xi Jinping made an historic trip to Panama, to message to the world (and to others in the region) about China's long-term commitment to Latin America and to a strategic partnership with Panama. The Panamanian government's sudden change in its diplomatic stance on this important issue not only caught Taipei and Washington by surprise, but more tellingly, reflects an inclination by long-standing U.S. partners that it is appropriate to change diplomatic affinity if the price is right. These types of joint statements of solidarity with the PRC may signal a broader Panamanian realignment with Chinese ideology; a move that would be unacceptable to U.S. national security.

An additional concern for the United States is the rise of leftist-leaning governments such as Argentina (recent shift to the left), Bolivia (snap general elections scheduled for 3 May 2020 may change their leftist disposition), Dominican Republic and Ecuador, and their inclination for increased diplomatic ties with China. Authoritarian and illegitimate dictatorial regimes such as those in Nicaragua and Venezuela, closely aligned with Chinese ideology, are also a source of friction, as they view the democratic values espoused by the United States and other Western allies as counter to their ability to maintain control. Explicitly, as is the case with the Maduro and Ortega regimes in Venezuela and Nicaragua, there is a deliberate attempt by those in power to

circumvent recent U.S.-led sanctions levied by the international community by leaning heavily on Chinese investment and security cooperation agreements to remain solidly in power. Accordingly, “China has lent more than \$50 billion to Venezuela through oil-for-loan agreements over the past decade,” further emphasizing the growing relationship between the two countries (Reuters, 2019). Despite the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, the CCP and the Maduro regime continue to work closely to advance their interests at the expense of the Venezuelan people.

Similarly, in Nicaragua, the Ortega dictatorship, ruled by nepotism, graft and human rights abuses, has sought to increase diplomatic ties with the PRC. The allure of China’s \$12 trillion-plus economy and a mutual interest to develop a Trans-Nicaragua Canal (figure 5 below) to rival the Panama Canal, has led to the signing of several bilateral agreements ranging from infrastructural development projects to security, scientific and educational exchanges. Although development of the Nicaragua Canal project is currently on hold due to environmental concerns,

Figure 5: Nicaragua Canal Project



Source: BBC news (2014) [<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-28206683>]

China remains committed to the project since its relevance is not just economic. The PRC sees the canal as a “major game changer... considering the fact that it could replace the monopoly of the Panama Canal [and]... it will enable China to obtain control of a key route of the world’s commerce” (Van de Maele, 2019). Moreover, China is using the possibility of this massive project to exert pressure on the Nicaraguan government, who is one of the few remaining countries that maintains diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The diplomatic positioning by both China and Taiwan due to the Nicaragua Canal is worth additional attention, especially in light of the recent \$100 million loan from Taiwan approved by Ortega’s socialist congress in early 2019.

The Chinese communist ideology and economic principles of a state-run economy, along with total governmental control over the population, are the optimum vessels for autocratic and dictatorial regimes in Latin America to keep a tight grip on power and squash dissent. The absolute political, economic, and societal control by China and the regime elite not only ensure their survival, but more concerning, contributes to weak governance and regional insecurity in the form of corruption, weak rule of law, lack of legal protections of economic and judicial reform. Additionally, through the use of recently created interdependent regional frameworks, the PRC is able to advance its foreign policy objectives in a manner that allows it to control the agenda without interference from non-member states like the United States or Canada.

Chinese diplomatic ambitions in LAC and the tools used to maintain access and influence are not just limited to economic manipulation. Other soft-power tools used by China include ‘so

called' educational and scientific exchanges, as well as other dependence-based mechanisms. Chinese diplomatic aspirations are supported through complementary educational, scientific and cultural engagements throughout the region, namely those that support their BRI. Over the past two years, Xi Jinping has put forth an all-encompassing agenda to further expand these initiatives, through a "1+3+6" plan that further entangles China and LAC diplomatically. This framework would consist of "...one plan, involving the three engines of trade, investment and financial cooperation, and six fields, including scientific and technological innovation" (Chauvin and Fraser, 2019). The plan has been met with enthusiasm, as LAC countries see the framework as an opportunity to "...secure investment for roads, power plants and other infrastructure they cannot afford" (Chauvin and Fraser, 2019). This multifaceted PRC approach takes into account diplomatic, economic, scientific and technological factors, thereby making it an enticing offer.

While PRC officials are seeking to increase their diplomatic influence with regard to specific issues such as the 'One-China policy' and regime legitimacy, the CCP is also interested in complementing its diplomatic efforts with regional frameworks aimed at increasing access to key sub-regions of interest, such as Central America and the Caribbean. Since the Chinese White Paper reports of 2014, regional frameworks have been at the forefront of Chinese-LAC dialogue. Evidence of this can be found in 2009, when China "...became a formal member in the Inter-American Development Bank..." as well as in the establishment of the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2014 (Cevallos, et al., 2018). The Chinese inclination for multilateralism is an integral part of its Grand Strategy in the developing world.

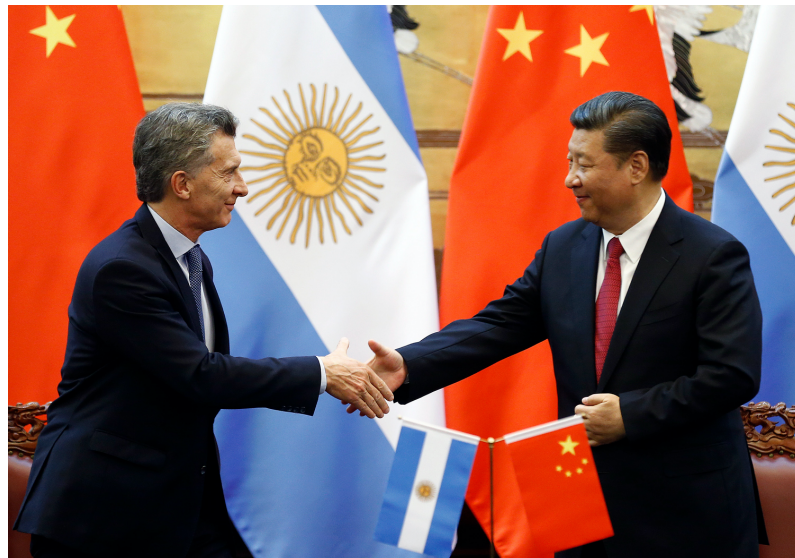
These targeted multilateral frameworks and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are established by China to signal to participating states, the rest of the region, the United States, and the world that the PRC remains in for the long haul in LAC. Specifically, China's foreign policy aim is to dispel the perception of it being a revisionist power. Instead, the PRC exploits U.S. hard-power gaffes and perceived disengagement with the region, including domestic messaging of needing to close its borders to migrants, decreased infrastructure investment, and withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, among other actions, that signal to the region a decreased level of commitment. China, as a renewed global power, is more than happy to fill the void by pumping large amounts of capital for much-needed infrastructure development projects and the like. The PRC, under a concerted grand strategy for LAC, also seeks to benefit from the U.S. history of imperialism in the region by carefully following Joseph Nye's soft-power script to secure closer government-to-government links that support China-friendly actions.

For example, "...Chile established a policy plan for China in 2009 and a China affairs group... in 2010" (Cevallos, et al., 2018). Similarly, Mexico created a trade office for China in 2013 (Cevallos, et al., 2018). Even a giant like Brazil "...plans to open a commercial office in Shanghai" (macahub.com, 2019). Another interesting outcome is the drastic increase in regional rhetoric following Xi Jinping's appointment as President and General Secretary of the CCP in 2013. His tenure has brought renewed Chinese ambition to advance diplomatic relations and growth in developing continents. Since 2015, "The Chinese government has strengthened its bilateral relations with ten LAC countries and gained official support from nine LAC [countries] to support its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" (usce.gov, 2018). Throughout, the PRC has signaled a willingness to lead development efforts in an attempt to legitimize its place in the

region. The steep increase in China-LAC engagement shows that even with ‘one-sided’ deals favoring China, most countries are still willing to establish closer ties with the PRC.

China’s external factors and geopolitical inclinations in the region follow a discernible diplomatic pattern between the need to expand its power abroad and “...a manifestation of authoritarianism at home, deemed necessary for the Party’s continued survival” (Shullan, 2019). The PRC’s focus on targeting strategic countries of interest like Argentina, Brazil and Panama follows this path. Argentina, which has been under challenging governance dynamics (e.g., unpopular austerity programs, corruption scandals, high amounts of debt, and spiralling economy) is a relevant example of China’s diplomatic strategy in action. Focused interactions with vulnerable heads of state are meant to “...tip the scales toward China-friendly politicians” (Shullan, 2019). The picture below (figure 6) between Previous Argentinian President, Mauricio Macri (2015-2019), and Xi Jinping illustrates this diplomatic inclination from China.

Figure 6: Xi Jinping Meets with Argentine President



Source: Pool/Getty Images AsiaPac (May 16, 2017)

Renewed engagement with Argentina's new center-left President Alberto Fernández follows the same level of interest as those of the two previous administrations (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Mauricio Macri). It also signifies the PRC's continued proclivity to target vulnerable heads of state in need of help. China's diplomatic continuity with Argentina is crucial to the execution of its strategy in the region: Argentina has the third largest economy in Latin America and "China is Argentina's largest lender, the biggest buyer of its exports, and since 2007, has invested almost US\$17 billion in infrastructure projects in the country" (Han, 2019). In addition to advancing activities under their joint 2017-2022 Action Plan, the PRC is also focused on doing whatever it takes to convince the Fernández administration to sign up for its BRI. So far, Fernández has not shown his foreign-policy cards, remaining somewhat neutral, since Argentina is in need for International Monetary Fund (IMF) reprieve from the United States and other Western allies. Although no signs of an agreement on BRI, China's strategic patience has begun to pay off as Fernández recently affirmed his desire to abandon the Lima Group (multilateral body created to put pressure on Venezuela's Maduro for regime change).

While Sino-Latin America diplomatic relations have strengthened over the past decade, areas of concern are beginning to take hold. LAC diplomats are finding it harder to ignore public sentiment due to common knowledge that deals with China come at a price without benefiting regular citizens. Many PRC initiatives, after the initial fanfare subsides and the dust settles, often result in systematic-wide issues, such as incomplete infrastructural projects, financial debt traps, broken promises, and the arrest of high-profile diplomats. For example, in Ecuador "...nearly

every top Ecuadorian official involved in the (Coca Codo Sinclair) dam construction either is imprisoned or the Ecuadorian courts have sentenced them on bribery charges” (Casey and Krauss, 2018). Due to the Ecuadorian government’s inability to pay back debt, China has been allowed to keep “80 percent of oil produced in the country” (Casey and Krauss, 2018). Similarly in Costa Rica, the Sinopec Oil refinery, constructed with the aid of Chinese companies, has been linked to numerous environmental issues to the point where “...The national secretary of the environment objected to the first evaluation for serious emissions” (Carvalho, 2019). These experiences are a stark reminder of the many pitfalls of dependence-based diplomatic relations. Awareness and transparency are the best diplomatic tools for the United States and its allies.

In addition to growing tensions in the realm of human rights, rule of law, and the environment, Latin American academics profess a ‘culture shock’ and lack of openness when working with Chinese counterparts. LAC researchers are usually not included in scientific or other technical discussions prior to final agreements being signed, limiting input and joint collaboration. In addition, Chinese scientists often receive access to facilities not open to other LAC researchers and academics. For example, it was found that “...Chinese scientists are able to apply for access to observation time that Chile is allotted at international astronomical facilities located in the country” (Chauvin and Fraser, 2019). Repeated frustration from Chilean, Argentinian, and other sub-regional researchers and scientists has been noted in this regard.

Although the PRC garners preferential consideration for technical exchanges and exerts tight control over scientific agreements, these types of partnerships between Chinese and LAC researchers will continue in the future due to the PRC’s deep pockets. The Chinese government

has provided much needed funding that otherwise would not have been available to build several astronomy sites and other scientific facilities across the region. This level of commitment by China, along with the lack of sufficient funding from the United States and other Western allies, limits the flexibility that Latin American scientists have, making the PRC the ‘partner of choice’ by default. Albeit the PRC clearly has the upper-hand, Chinese policymakers, particularly those working in STEM fields, will need to address the growing Latin American concern of academic totalitarianism, as well as the continuation of unfair business and scientific practices.

The best course of action for limiting the number of one-sided, dependence-based PRC-LAC agreements that put nations in a vulnerable position is to continue to increase awareness on China’s standing practices. Often, LAC governments enter into close diplomatic and economic arrangements with China because the public is either unaware or unable to influence the government’s decision due to bribes and high levels of corruption. Corruption in the Americas affects every level of society, and democracy itself, in the form of domestic instability leading to populist, anti-democratic governments due to a lack of trust in elected officials and high levels of inequality. In LAC, “...one in three people paid a bribe to access a service in 2016. Bribes are estimated to have cost at least \$2 trillion annually (2 percent of global GDP), [and],... seven out of ten people cite dissatisfaction with their governments” (Barco et al, 2018). Brazil’s Odebrecht scandal is the most current and tangible example of the consequences of rampant corruption, having affected 14 LAC countries to date (Barco et al, 2018). Deep-seated corruption, along with undue influence by external state actors such as China, represent the highest threat to sustainable economic, political, and social change in the region.

Corruption and the lack of political commitment by most governments to address its many variations is the Achilles heel of most LAC governments, and an impediment to many young democracies in the region. Specifically, “Corruption retards development, undermines human rights and freedom, and perpetuates social exclusion and poverty, ... [and] infects every dimension of society” (Barco et al, 2018). The high level of resentment toward governments due to long-standing corruption has also extended beyond democratically elected societies and into non-democratically aligned countries. For example, in Cuba, despite the government continuing to foster closer relations with China and Russia, high levels of corruption and inequality between the population and the communist elite have some re-evaluating their options and looking to the West. A recent poll in Cuba found that “...55 percent said that normal relations with the U.S. would be mostly good for the country... [among] Cubans aged 18-29, approval of closer relations with the U.S. rose to 70 percent” (Swanson and Weissenstein, 2017). These statistics support the argument that U.S. foreign policymakers would be better served to work toward changes in public sentiment, rather than pushing for outright change in governments.

Another way for the United States to compete more effectively in the diplomatic realm is to legitimize the use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as mechanisms for change. Emphasis should be placed on expanding the utility of established NGOs that provide value added over increasing redundant NGOs. Currently, there is a legitimate criticism of LAC NGOs, particularly those associated with the United States, as being state tools. Many LAC countries feel that “...these organizations received U.S. dollars often to intervene in the political affairs of (countries) whose policies fall out of line with U.S. policies and objectives” (telesur.net, 2016). This historical baggage, coupled with inconsistent U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America,

leaves room for mistrust. Therefore, the United States should consider promoting NGOs that LAC countries can *actually* utilize, rather than forcing those that only serve U.S. interests. This would entail having the State Department and other bureaucratic agencies work closely with Latin American diplomats to scope the needs of friendly state-actors. Once LAC interests are understood, U.S. advisors would work to co-sponsor pre-existing NGOs that align with such interests. These coordinated actions by the United States and Western allies would facilitate improved cooperation to advance common objectives and counter bellicose PRC acts.

Based on the evidence provided, diplomatic engagement between China and LAC countries is expected to increase. The United States should expect countries in the region to also continue to accept the PRC's diplomatic advances, as well as the legitimization of China-led alliances and regional arrangements. Similarly, it is expected that the United States will attempt to increase its presence in the region. U.S. foreign policy advisors should anticipate and strive for the United States to reinvigorate U.S.-led regional NGOs to counteract unchecked Chinese influence. Yet, in order for the United States to achieve sustainable success in diplomatic relations, a clear understanding within the realm of information capabilities is also necessary. Explicitly, the United States and its allies will need to limit the ease at which the PRC extends its surveillance and intelligence capabilities throughout the region.

V. INFORMATION ACCESS

In order to maintain authoritarian control domestically and expand its influence abroad, China requires vast amounts of societal, cultural, technological, and private information. Chinese

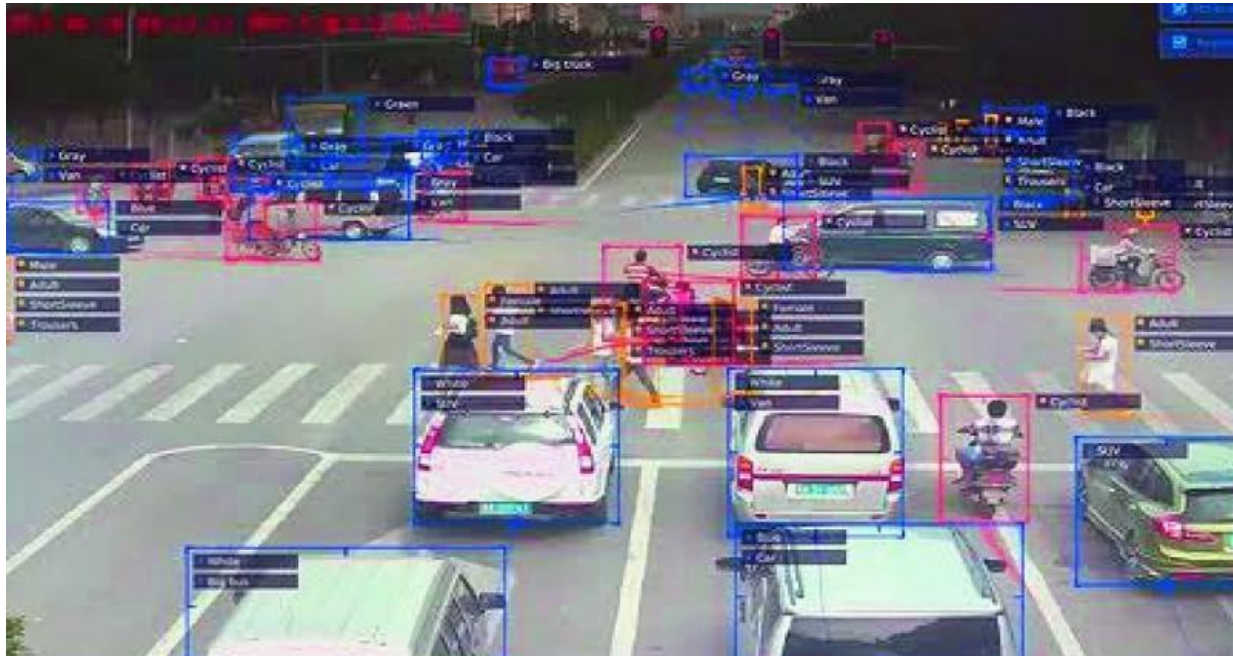
intelligence gathering follows a specific path; one that the rest of the world has recently become aware of. In an attempt to assert control over the information domain throughout LAC, China practices various forms of intelligence collection and cyber-offensive operations, to include targeted surveillance and sponsoring state-controlled media networks throughout the region. In addition to strengthening China's position, these intelligence-driven capabilities allow the PRC to better control the flow of information, especially when it pertains to U.S. involvement in the region. PRC information warfare "...is directed at the enemy's information detection sources, information channels, and information-processing and decision making systems" (Thomas, Pg. 3). In light of China's expanding informational efforts within LAC, it is crucial that awareness about such practices be increased throughout the region. This should be accomplished not only to expose the dangers of intrusive information operations and propaganda-type information, but at the very least, to give Latin American leaders a basic understanding of Chinese intelligence and surveillance tactics to make informed decisions when dealing with China.

In addition to the added costs that China's dependence-based engagement brings to the region, the PRC's goal to weaponize the information domain and erode democratic governance is equally disturbing. As part of its strategy to gain the upper hand in information operations, China seeks to ramp-up informational capabilities down to the local level. Notably, "the availability of high-speed mass communication..." enables the PRC to manipulate information at a much faster rate than in previous decades (Zappone, 2019). In wanting to further their economic and technological innovation, some LAC countries, inexperienced in the handling of technologies, often enter into agreements with Chinese conglomerates without realizing the long-term consequences of opening up their informational networks to outside powers like China. CCP-

controlled tech giants like Alibaba, Tencent and Huawei have aggressively stepped into LAC markets, leading the way in e-commerce, messaging technologies, and 5G networks, among other areas. Should China continue as the undisputed leader, and the United States and its allies opt to neglect the informational arena, informational dependence on China will increase China's legitimacy among state-actors in the region. The unchecked implementation of a China-led information revolution presents a threat to democracies and regional security.

It is well-established that PRC officials are keen on expanding surveillance capabilities over the Chinese population. In addition to the CCP's tightening grip around internet and digital information, the PRC has also invested heavily in surveillance capabilities. The CCP already employs "...a facial recognition system in a Muslim-dominated village that would alert authorities when a targeted person moves more than 1,000 feet beyond a designated safe area" (Shen, 2018). Advanced surveillance technologies such as these are now being implemented across the rest of the country and exported abroad to Latin America and other developing regions. The picture below (figure 8) highlights the various advancements that Chinese artificial intelligence (A.I.) has made in facial recognition by implementing technologies that mimic an Orwellian dystopia. Although much of these "Skynet" type technologies are in their infancy, the progress made, as shown in the picture, is worrisome since it holds everyone's privacy at risk.

Figure 7: Chinese “Skynet” System



Source: Deccan Chronicle.com, 2018

As of 2018, the Chinese government “...has an estimated 200 million surveillance cameras — four times as many as the United States... Additionally, the CCP wants to raise that number to 300 million cameras by the year 2020” (Mozur, 2018). To put this number in perspective, by the end of 2020, there will be roughly one camera for every five Chinese citizens. Neither the United States, nor its allies, can dissuade China from collecting intelligence on its own citizens. However, it becomes a larger issue when these technologies become widespread across LAC. Therefore, the United States and other Western democracies must resort to effectively advising countries in the region against entering into technology agreements with China that seek to incorporate these types of information-based systems into their societies. The

United States, however, needs to achieve this goal in a non-interventionist manner. This will go a long way in rebuilding the United States' deteriorating reputation in the region.

It is well-understood that the United States also possesses these types of informational technologies and related capabilities, and based on the National Security Agency (NSA) leaks of 2013, the United States has even participated in surveillance operations at home and abroad. Yet, the in-depth level at which China wants to implement information and surveillance technologies extends farther than that of the United States or any other country, even Russia. Furthermore, the United States has well-established protocols and rules in an open, democratic system that, at the very least, limit the capability of the government to secretly conduct widespread surveillance operations. Conversely, the combination of a closed system based on China's communist regime and that of autocratic states within Latin America provides a worrisome catalyst for the control of information on a massive scale and for the rapid rise of digital authoritarianism. Therefore, the exportation of these technologies by China to suspect Latin American countries that may not necessarily have the political will nor the moral or technological capability to wield these systems responsibly poses a grave security risk to the region.

An additional concern with the widespread use of Chinese surveillance technologies across LAC is the potential for embedded Chinese spyware. While the implementation of mass surveillance across the region may seem to be the pinnacle of this particular problem-set, even more problematic is the intentional embedding of Chinese spyware in commercially-used technologies. Simply put, "If enough countries adopt Chinese technology, Beijing will be able to integrate the different assets into a transnational, 'incredibly effective surveillance complex' that

reinforces China's political and economic influence” (Gehrke, 2019). Countries in LAC may not be privy to this information, as the spyware would be used for intelligence gathering and other covert uses. Furthermore, even countries who *do* recognize the spyware could use this embedded capability to effectively control their populace, particularly in authoritarian dictatorships like those in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. As such, the development of Chinese surveillance capabilities in LAC and that of corrupt authoritarian regimes that can systematically ‘crack down’ on dissent and democracy is also of concern.

In addition to the implementation of surveillance capabilities, China is also aggressively seeking to develop 5G technologies across the region. Most LAC countries have either already entered into binding agreements with major Chinese technology companies or are considering partnerships in this domain. Even countries considered to be strong U.S. allies are opting to align with China on this new frontier. For example, in Brazil, “China’s Huawei will not be restricted... where plans are under way to launch a 5G network... across the region” (Aljazeera, 2019). Likewise, in Chile “Sebastián Piñera, Chile’s president, met Huawei chairman Liang Hua in Shenzhen in April and said ‘Huawei is welcome to participate in public tenders’ for 5G and fiber optic cable projects” (EIRNS, 2019). Even business associates from Argentina are claiming “...there is no way Huawei is going to be excluded,” from participating in the country (Mander, 2019). These types of ‘mutually beneficial agreements’ between China and LAC countries raise concerns about potential security threats to fragile democracies, the United States and its allies.

Chinese companies charged with the implementation of 5G technologies will undoubtedly set in place data collecting capabilities for the PRC. These actions by Chinese

companies under PRC control will lead to an interconnected web of Chinese technologies that can collect data, spy on citizens, and identify future Chinese threats and opportunities in the region. For these reasons, many analysts argue that Chinese companies, especially Huawei, are steps ahead of U.S. and European telecommunications companies with regard to 5G technology. Due to the perceived benefits of deals too good to pass up, Latin America appears more concerned with having access to high-speed information technologies than with the risk of surveillance or other security risks from China. The United States and its allies have noted that “China’s 5G technology isn’t particularly cost-effective once you factor the resources needed to address potential security risks, including the sorts of ‘hidden backdoors’ in Huawei equipment” (Myers and Montenegro, 2019). Due to this perceived technological and market advantage, the PRC will likely continue to aggressively promote their informational interests in the region.

While Chinese surveillance and 5G technology implementation throughout LAC serves as a covert tool for the expansion of Chinese influence, the use of sanctioned, state-controlled media in the region by authoritarian regimes benefiting from such technologies further restricts the free flow of information. It is common knowledge that the control of information across the globe remains a top priority for the CCP. Specifically, China continues to invest heavily in state-controlled virtual platforms and associated information-related equipment within LAC, with the intent of increasing the flow of information to and from China. These multimedia platforms are “...a mixture of China-centric news and entertainment familiar to any other consumer of Chinese media. China also... produces daily Spanish and Portuguese-language content, as does China Radio International” (Barrios, 2018). These media outlets often display Chinese cartoons,

documentaries and even air programs that help teach Mandarin. As part of its long-term strategy, the PRC seeks to secure access to the information domain. Accordingly, the CCP actively engages in a focused multi-media, messaging and misinformation campaign meant to target LAC consumers and to advance its ideological propaganda in the region.

China-LAC media forums and informational agreements, touted as mutually beneficial exchanges, are used by the PRC as state-sponsored tools to access economic information and future trends in the region. Several LAC countries have embraced China's 'mutual cooperation' informational and media campaign efforts. China-CELAC forum members such as Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Peru, among others, have hailed China as playing a fundamental role in this arena. Their 2015-2019 Cooperation Plan, captures areas of mutual collaboration, to include "cooperation in the information industry in such fields as internet and digital television, ...signing of comprehensive agreements in radio, television, and film, ...landing of Chinese radio and television programs and... cooperation between publishing industries" (China-CELAC Forum Cooperation Plan, 2015). Increased Chinese investment in the informational arena has proven a powerful motivator for capitals to align with China. Ultimately, the willingness by LAC governments to engage in PRC-sanctioned, informational mechanisms strengthens CCP control in the region. This trend is expected to continue, as China seeks to centralize its media content to fortify the state's ability to control the dissemination of information at home and abroad.

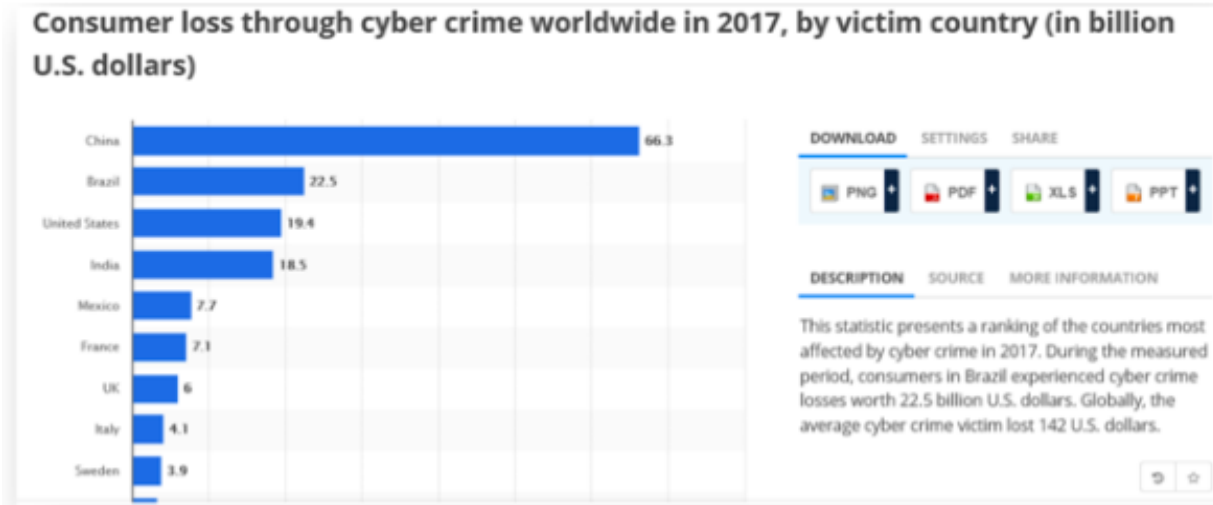
It should be noted that the spread of Chinese media into LAC in the form of a controlling stake in many multi-media companies is not an issue of globalization. Rather, the spread of

Chinese culture and influence through various informational mediums such as television, cell phones, newspaper and radio, is a direct result of a carefully crafted, long-term strategy to incorporate Chinese culture and information into the daily lives of LAC citizens. Although the PRC touts the benefits of free flow of information and cultural exchanges, the problem arises when consumer media becomes an extension of the CCP and its policies. In essence, the PRC is “Harnessing advances in intelligence and data mining and storage to construct detailed profiles on all citizens...” (Mitchell and Diamond, 2018). The broader issue with countries whose societies are so tightly controlled by a central government is the total manipulation of the information domain to affect the daily lives of citizens in order to benefit authoritarian regimes and external state actors like China. Therefore, even seemingly innocent iterations of Chinese media exchanges with LAC countries serve a specific purpose for both illegitimate Latin American authoritative regimes and for the CCP in perpetuating their nefarious acts.

The aggregation of China’s information capabilities (surveillance technologies, 5G development, artificial intelligence, multimedia influence, etc.) calls into question the need for advances in U.S. other Western nations cyber security technologies to counter the PRC’s informational control over the region. Revisionist states like China, Russia and Iran, have all developed advanced information-based capabilities in an effort to decrease U.S. influence in the region, while also gathering information from LAC public and private servers. Cyber attacks have become more frequent over the past decade, costing nations several billion dollars a year. Strategic significant countries like Brazil and Mexico have experienced the brunt of the cyber attacks, totaling over \$30 billion dollars in losses in 2017 alone (table 1 below). While these

cyber attacks come from around the globe, evidence suggests that a sizable portion originate from revisionist states like China and Russia.

Table 1: Consumer Loss Through Worldwide Cyber-Crime in 2017



Source: lookingglasseyber.com, 2018

For the PRC in particular, it “...draws on the legacy of the CCP’s Leninist organizational principles,” in regard to cyber conflict doctrine (Green, etc., 2019). This distinction in cyberspace doctrine is important when understanding China’s aims in the region, as it views cyber capabilities as a medium from which to enact offensive operations. Cyber operations are actively carried out by the PLA both in the military and non-military realms. A wide-range of advanced capabilities allows the PRC to covertly engage in cyberspace operations, while remaining in a ‘gray zone’ where accountability is rare and any U.S. response is deemed excessive. Therefore, U.S. and other Western policy-makers, LAC countries, NGOs, and

multilateral forums must all work together to counter the militarization of information by external state actors like China.

Additionally, the allure of growing LAC markets and the race to “commercialize” transformative technologies not only invites increased competition from technology conglomerates and start-ups, but also exposes security fissures exploitable by the PRC and other neo-revisionist states. The ability for the CCP to monitor the lives of citizens at home and abroad with such ease makes it a threat to both people’s privacy rights and to democracy itself. In Venezuela, “Reuters recently reported that China’s LTE Technology had enabled socialist dictator Nicolas Maduro to use the so-called “Fatherland Card” to collect personal data and track the behavior of citizens” (Mora, 2018). The PRC’s actions to leverage the information domain to advance its self-interests also encourages authoritarian regimes to undermine democracy.

The realization that “The Chinese government maintains the world’s most sophisticated internet censorship apparatus,” coupled with its willingness to work with illegitimate regimes, and the absence of sanctioned rules to curb such behavior, are key reasons for why control of the information domain is an attractive proposition to authoritarian regimes (China Freedom House, 2019). For example, the increased economic, military and technological support provided by China and Russia to Daniel Ortega’s dictatorship in Nicaragua has allowed the regime to maintain a tight grip on power. This has resulted in the “erosion of democracy and human rights abuses in Nicaragua,” leading to the elimination of dissent, suppression of the press, and narrowing the democratic space by any means necessary (CRSR Report, 2020). These types of

social control mechanisms are troubling as they advance both the agendas of illegitimate regimes and the wide-spread use of Chinese-made technologies that put individual freedoms at risk.

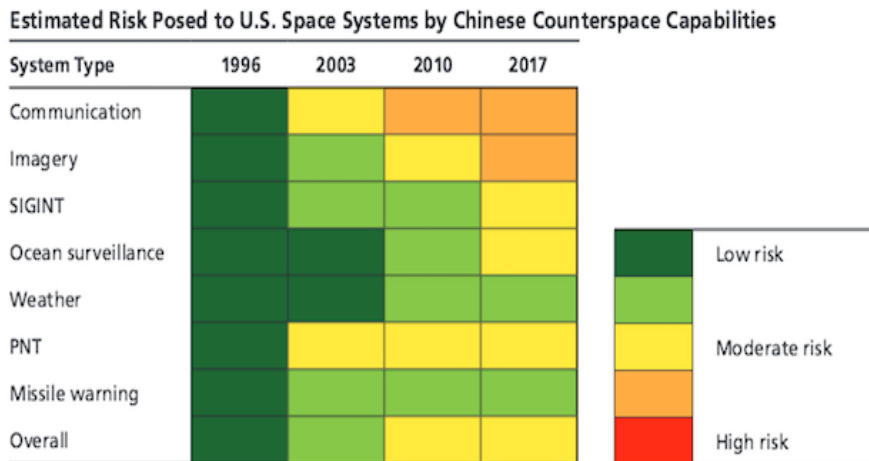
A recent public policy forum at Florida International University captured the essence of the proliferation of Chinese technologies and the challenges to democratic interests in the Western Hemisphere. Acknowledging that along with the PRC's predatory economic practices, "Chinese technologies undermine the efficacy of democratic institutions and expand Chinese influence across economic, political, and security landscapes" (Fonseca, 2019). Most concerning, is the ease by which the PRC incorporates spyware into AI, 5G, and other digital technologies across the region without regard for its effects. These types of information-control moves by China and its proxies demand that willing actors like the United States and other Western democracies collectively act to counter information operations. However, to date, no real consequences have been levied by the international community to curb the use of offensive information operations. Therefore, it is expected that this kind of fragrant behavior in the information environment will continue unabated throughout into the foreseeable future.

VI. Military Relations

While Chinese diplomatic and informational mechanisms offer a more subversive and manipulative approach, concerns over increased military influence by China throughout LAC are also taking hold. Although the U.S. military is considered the preeminent force in the Western hemisphere and around the world, a surge in military cooperation between China and LAC countries has allowed China to strengthen its military access and deterrence capabilities in the

region. The PRC’s pursuit of a global blue-water navy has proven to be more than just rhetoric, as the “...PLA (People’s Liberation Army) navy now has about 400 warships and submarines, according to U.S. and other Western naval analysts” (Reuters, 2019). It appears the Chinese Navy is moving its ambitions toward the region in order to provide regional state-actors and authoritative regimes an alternative to a U.S. military presence. Table 2 below shows the correlation between PRC advanced capabilities over the past two decades and the increased risk to the United States. Similar to its diplomatic and informational efforts, China’s military strategy, through the use of military-to-military partnerships, and security cooperation activities and access agreements, are all meant to counterbalance a sustained U.S. presence in the region.

Table 2: Stock Of Chinese Direct Investment in Latin America

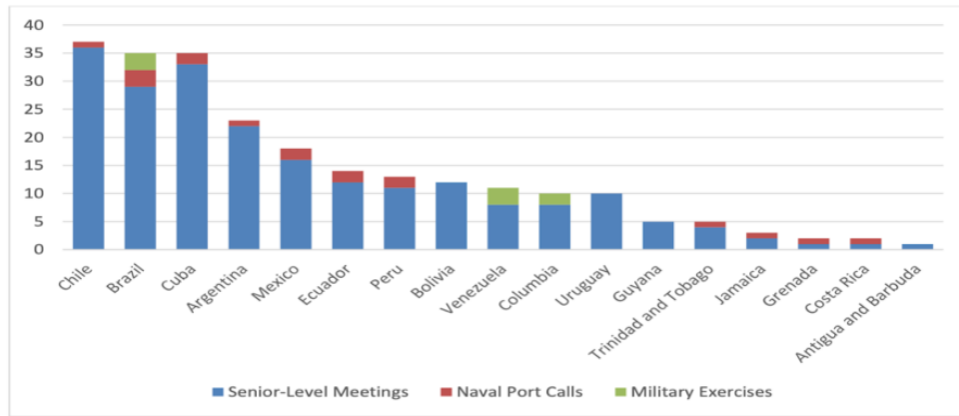


Source: Rand Corporation (2015)

The ability to orchestrate large military operations throughout LAC is of utmost importance to China. In order to increase its ability to maintain a military foothold in the region, the PRC has dramatically raised the number of military exercises and security cooperation

activities, and professional military education and training programs. Participating countries are provided military aid, training equipment free of charge, and the opportunity to send troops to mainland China to further develop their professional military education and skills. The PRC has also brought selected officers to the strategic-level, College of Defense Studies at the National Defense University, one of the most prestigious military universities in China. These military exchanges and other military-to-military (mil-to-mil) programs, as shown in the table below, allow the PLA to garner recognition on an international scale, while also indoctrinating participating countries with an in-depth look at PLA operations and CCP ideology..

Table 3: China’s Personnel Exchanges and Military Exercises with LAC, 2003-2016



Source: Kenneth Allen, Philip C. Saunders, and John Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2013–2016: Trends and Implications,” *Chinese Strategic Perspectives* 11 (July 17, 2017). <http://www.ssri-j.com/MediaReport/DocumentUS/INSSreportChinaPerspectives.pdf>.

The PRC stresses particular importance on all types of personnel mil-to-mil exchanges, where “...Chinese institutions host Latin American military personnel from at least 18 states in Latin America...” (Ellis, 2018). To place this level of mil-to-mil interaction in perspective, that represents nearly every country in Central and South America. In addition to these exchange programs, China seeks to enhance its ability to lead military exercises throughout the region.

This is seen through an increase in Chinese-led peacekeeping operations throughout LAC countries. China is now the “...largest provider of peacekeepers of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council...” where it leads over 3,100 missions (Marcela, 2012). While most of these operations are held in Africa, such operations have been gradually spreading to LAC countries such as Haiti and Venezuela. U.S. national security and other Western analysts should expect this trend of Chinese-LAC military cooperation to continue to increase in the near future.

In order for the PLA to strengthen its military position in the region, its forces must be able to rapidly deploy troops to garner strategic and regional access when needed. Therefore, the PLA seeks to build a wide array of military installations around the globe, to include those in LAC. These bases will serve as military hubs, as well as installation support elements from which the PRC can expand strategic and economic initiatives. Specifically, China is forging closer military relations with select countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, as well as various Caribbean nations. The fact that some of these countries have recently cut ties with Taiwan, due to a concerted PRC diplomatic and economic pressure campaign, has allowed China to further increase its military presence in their soil.

The combination of increased Sino-Chilean and Argentinian military exchanges and those of other Latin American countries; a greater commitment to basing rights; and upsurge in Chinese arms sales, has further raised geopolitical tension in the region. For example, U.S. foreign policy analysts fear that El Salvador may turn its ‘La Union’ commercial port into a quasi-Chinese military installation. Similarly, a Chinese ‘space station’ in Argentina is being used as a military base. It is clear that China seeks “..to acquire or help develop overseas ports in

strategic locations that could serve its long-term interests” (Lo, 2018). Although some locations are not overtly advertised as military bases, they provide the PRC room to transform civilian installations into full-fledged bases should the need arise. Additionally, China seeks to closer bilateral relations with Panama in a way that excludes the United States. From a PRC lens, this could lead to an alliance similar to that of the United States and South Korea in Southeast Asia. If this were to occur, it would escalate tensions further between the U.S. and China.

China’s emphasis on dual-use technologies also elevates the risk of spillover into the military domain. The implementation of 5G agreements throughout the region represent this type of risk, as the underlying technological aspect of U.S-Chinese great power military rivalry continues to grow. Most LAC consumers perceive 5G technology as the next revolution in data speeds and network connectivity. However, this new era also represents an increased strategic risk resulting from any single actor exerting undue influence over the system. Chinese network conglomerates like Huawei and ZTE (under state control) have the ability to adversely affect these critical information systems, particularly through penetration of embedded spyware into government and civilian-use networks. Due to the increased CCP and PLA interaction with LAC government officials and military leaders, many “...in the U.S. national-security establishment rightly fear that equipment made by these companies could allow Beijing to siphon off sensitive [military], personal or corporate data” (Gorman, 2020). Even of greater concern to security professionals is the fear that Chinese companies can implant “kill switches” in 5G devices. Should this occur, U.S. military and communication capabilities would be compromised.

It is apparent that the PRC aims to not only establish closer military relations across LAC, but to also increase arms exports to the region. In the past, “...little assessment has been placed on China’s emergence into the region’s arms market...,” with only a recent upward trend being recognized in the region (Gurrola, 2018). However, latest data shows that arms exports are larger than previously thought, especially in countries like Venezuela and Bolivia. In Bolivia, the value of arms imports has risen to nearly \$50 million a year, while in Venezuela, it has reached nearly \$700 million (SIPRI.org, 2016). While China’s arms sales may not seem exorbitantly high at “...about 615 million in the past five years,” the growth in recent arms sales represents China’s military aspirations to increase its military presence in the region (Woody, 2019). Additionally, “China’s ‘non-intervention’ policy makes arms sales attractive for countries...” (Gurrola, 2018). Although the increase in arms exports has, so far, come from countries that would traditionally be considered to align against U.S. ideologies, the sudden increase is alarming.

While the upsurge in Chinese arms sales represents one of the smaller (although growing) issues within LAC, even more concerning for the United States is the growing prevalence of Chinese ‘gifts’ to partnering countries, in the form of military equipment. Navy Admiral Craig S. Faller, USSOUTHCOM Commander, recognizes this recent development as a pressing issue, affirming that what is “...high is China's gifts of military stuff [and that] ...it's happening everywhere" (Woody, 2019). These gifts include Chinese armed vehicles, radar systems and military equipment, most often used for repression of population protests in countries like Venezuela and Nicaragua. These types of gifts have become so prevalent in the region that it “...undermines partnerships with the US [and] contributes to instability...” (Woody, 2019). For the United States, dealing with this issue is difficult, as it provides non-democratic LAC states an

opportunity to strengthen their regimes for little-to-no *immediate* cost. The U.S. military may not be able to prevent these types of China-LAC military agreements from existing, but highlighting the issues that arise from accepting these ‘gifts’ will prove effective in the long-term.

An additional military consideration of major strategic consequence is China’s priority to stay in the forefront of dual-use technologies and related Sino-LAC partnerships that extend beyond the information domain. Against a backdrop of mutually beneficial interactions such as mil-to-mil cooperation; economic and ‘scientific’ investments; ‘educational’ grants; and equipment donations to LAC militaries, the real impetus for the PRC’s growing influence in Latin America is the preservation of the CCP and its authoritarian model at home and abroad.. “Chinese leaders recognize that to achieve legitimacy... without democratizing--a prospect not welcomed in the developing West--they must first popularize China’s model in the developing world” (Shullman, 2019). Accordingly, China’s foreign policy apparatus (DIME), in addition to the advancement of its economic interests as a key objective, revolves around the need to undermine democracies and shore up authoritarian regimes.

China’s expanding reach in Latin America and how it proceeds to secure dual use technologies and regional access is nowhere more pronounced than with the Space-Monitoring Chinese Base in Argentina’s Patagonia. The PLA-run base, with its 16-story tower, 35-meter, 45-ton parabolic antenna, is the mainstay of a \$50 million satellite and space control station built by the Chinese military for ‘peaceful space observation and exploration’ (figure 8 below). Although on Argentinian soil, the Argentinian scientists will only be allowed to use up to 10% of the station antenna time (Wilson, 2015). Due to China’s already expansive telecommunications

network and a mounting cyber-warfare risk, the strategic importance of such a base is of tremendous significance. Though China has agreed not to use the base for military purposes, there is the real possibility it will be used against the United States and LAC governments. With China declaring space as the next battlespace (and the United States creating the U.S. Space Force as the sixth military service in 2019), control for the space domain has taken on a new meaning in ‘superpower competition’ from the barren lands of Argentina's Patagonia region.

Figure 8: Chinese Space Station in the Patagonia Region, Argentina



Source: Reuters, www.daily.mail.com (7 Feb 2019)

Although touted by the PRC as a space station that will only be used for scientific use, the true nature of such a system is to offset U.S. military superiority asymmetrically (since U.S. advanced weapon and navigation systems such as the Global Positioning System (GPS) are derived from space). This type of dual-use capability, could easily be employed by the PRC to weaponize space with advanced technology able to detect, track, and destroy U.S. and other Western satellites as well as serving as a “A giant vacuum cleaner... sucking up signals, data, [and] all sorts of things” (Londono, 2018). By making itself indispensable to the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner government during the height of Argentina’s financial crisis, China was able to negotiate the base in secrecy, and without opposition, until the project neared completion and bilateral agreements were firmly in place (Londono, 2018). From Patagonia, China is now able to increase its intelligence-gathering capabilities throughout the region.

The PRC’s recent push to exert greater military influence in LAC serves their main purpose of countering U.S. regional dominance. Similarly to U.S. military forces stationed in the Asia-Pacific, increased Chinese military presence in the region sends a message to Washington that China is *also* able to deploy at a moment’s notice around the world. While the PLA is clearly not able to contend with the United States military in a present-day conflict scenario, the CCP’s track record for infusing fast-track military development, particularly in the past decade, is not only of concern to U.S. security experts, but also to the overall geopolitical balance in the region. Therefore, it has become increasingly clear that the United States will need to further strengthen its ability to develop closer military ties, supported by expanded security cooperation efforts and military personnel training and education exchanges with key partners and allies in the region.

VII. ECONOMIC CAPABILITIES

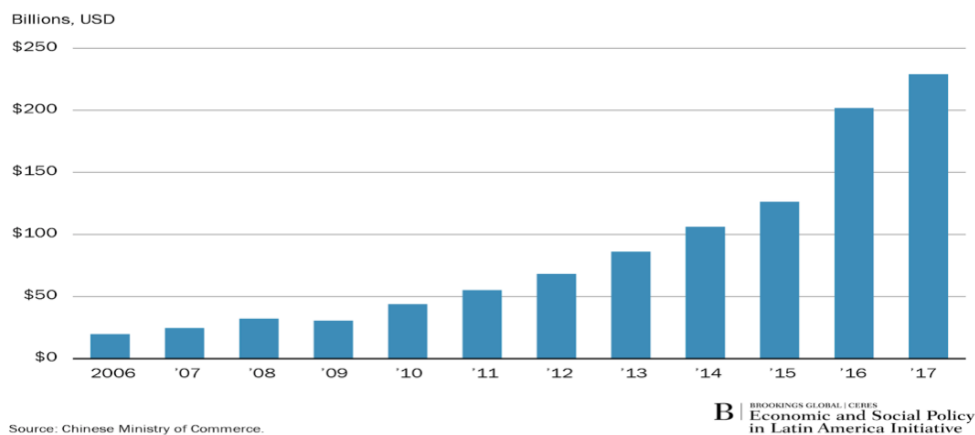
Great power economic competition in Latin America is viewed as a zero-sum game by China and the United States. Any flow of capital and increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in LAC financial sectors ultimately improves the strategic position of the intervening great power, while systematically lowering its rival's capabilities. Yet, the implementation of a U.S.-LAC foreign policy agenda based on zero-sum assumptions is limiting for an increasingly interconnected region. U.S-China great-power competition must therefore adapt to the interconnectedness of economic globalization. Presently, Latin America finds itself in a delicate position, where it “Must engage China for short-term trade opportunities without jeopardizing long-term, sustainable economic growth..., it must also preserve important ties to the United States and North America, which provide... crucial economic, diplomatic, and security support” (Garcia, 2018). In light of interrelated geopolitical futures presented by an increasingly multipolar world in which ascending powers like Russia and China seek to undermine the U.S.-led LIO, LAC countries must forge a careful balance between great power competition dynamics and their level of collaboration to effectively advance their own interests.

This portion of the manuscript emphasizes the need for a regional economic framework that implements a mutually beneficial and interdependent structure as part of a less restrictive foreign policy. Such a structure would encompass a system of regional partnerships and NGOs to incentivize economic cooperation rather than a primacy on divergent, unilateral great power initiatives. Since economic prosperity and stability is a key priority for the United States, China, and participating LAC countries in the region, the United States should emphasize the need to

align Chinese actions to be in accordance with international rules and norms. Additionally, this paper posits that attempting to push Chinese economic initiatives out of the region altogether is unrealistic. Therefore, the focus must be on implementing a clearly defined strategy that incorporates economic convergence while regulating implementation under a future that incorporates all regional actors, to include a PRC that abides by established international rules.

The PRC's economic engagement in LAC follows a similar pattern as that of other developing regions. Chinese investors are interested in developing infrastructure, technology and energy-grid projects. Additionally, most Sino-led companies, as a main stipulation for making investments in the region, dictate the terms of agreements, to include the demand that Chinese workers solely work on infrastructure development or other projects. From a PRC lens, these types of investments have proven effective in laying "...the groundwork for increased economic connectivity...[and]... regional political integration" (Nathanson, 2018). Similarly, LAC countries are quick to accept Chinese loans and FDI, as it strengthens local economies and provides greater access to infrastructure and basic resources (water, electricity, etc.). Table 4 below illustrates the dramatic increase in Chinese direct investment over the past decade.

Table 4: China Direct Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean (2006-2017)



Although PRC direct investment in LAC has surged over the past ten years, in the longer-term, buyer’s remorse is typically prevalent in countries that partner with China. The high level of PRC investment often comes at a cost of accumulating debt and economic dependence. LAC governments unable to pay off a mounting debt to Chinese state-owned companies generally resort to relinquishing resources to China, such as land, infrastructure, natural resources, and other concessions. For example, Guyana and Jamaica are having to provide additional allowances to the PRC as a result of unfavorable terms of payment with Chinese investors. Analysts have dubbed this prevalent state-sponsored Chinese tactic as ‘predatory economics,’ in which the country receiving the foreign investment is left holding a high level of debt. Economic dependence schemes are among the main tools in China foreign policy playbook since they allow the CCP to extend its reach across borders and dictate the economic agenda.

In order for China to have become, “...Latin America’s largest creditor,” a recognizable and repeatable pathway needed to be made (Nathanson, 2018). PRC state-sponsored economic statecraft is this ‘recognizable and repeatable pathway’ which allows the PRC to become the

economic powerhouse in the region. China's massive economic portfolio represents the largest portion of its strategy, tightly orchestrated to manipulate the economic needs of less developed countries and emerging economies. China recognizes that Latin American nations often seek out FDI at any cost to support their growing economies. It is not that LAC state-actors are unable to recognize the debt-trap they fall into, rather, they accept it as a cost of doing business with China. Additionally, the absence of viable FDI from other countries such as the United States is also a contributing factor. Therefore, to fuel their developing economies, it is expected that LAC governments will continue to enter into economic agreements with the PRC at a high rate.

The allure of economic prosperity along with corruption by the government elite incentivizes politicians to enter into one-sided agreements with China. The potential economic boost, coupled with bribes, often results in fast-track approval for Chinese-led investments. Additionally, a lack of perceived interest by the United States also contributes to China's economic dominance in the region. When the United States does invest in the region, it does so under stringent conditions. Conversely, PRC investments come with 'no strings attached.' Chinese FDI also has a greater capacity for circumventing international law, safety standards, workers' rights, etc. Figure 9 below highlights the rapid pace by which Chinese banks have increased loans throughout LAC, leading to a mounting debt for participating countries.

Figure 9: Latin American Partners with China and Mounting Debt



Source: Gallagher & Myers. China–LA Finance Database (Inter-American Dialogue, 2019)

While Chinese investment levels are daunting to those looking to compete with the PRC, it is important that U.S. policy makers recognize the framework from which Chinese investments operate within the region. A majority of investments fall into infrastructure and energy resource development. The PRC places infrastructure projects and resource extraction as its top priority. China prioritizes these types of investments because it relies on control of key infrastructure sectors, access to natural resources, and employment abroad to sustain economic growth and feed a population nearing 1.5 billion people. One can see that “As a percentage of the country’s GDP, China’s annual average infrastructure spending is one of the highest in the world at 8.3 percent” (Statista.com, 2019). The PRC’s extensive investment footprint is part of its long-term capital strategy in the region. A recent shift in focus, however, points to diversification as a new

enabler to reduce investment risk (loan defaults) and maximize return on investment. This new approach includes the incorporation of a diverse portfolio that ranges from current investments in infrastructure development, banking, and extraction of natural resources, to a renewed emphasis on domestic markets, particularly in the technology and consumer goods and services sectors.

Infrastructure development and other related projects provide nearly instant employment and a fixed-asset in which monetary value can be held. This is also one of the main reasons why Chinese investors purchase real estate throughout LAC, as these physical assets are directly tied to wealth in a more tangible fashion, rather than currency alone. Furthermore, with China expecting to invest over 800 billion Yuan (119 billion U.S. dollars) in railway construction and 1.8 trillion Yuan in road construction and waterway projects in 2019 alone, and its economy showing signs of slowing down, it is highly unlikely that the CCP will slow this high level of investment anytime soon (Bo, 2019). Consequently, the United States and other Western allies should similarly focus on increasing their level of FDI and other economic initiatives to support growing economies and strengthen democratic governments throughout the region.

China's infrastructure investment modalities also correlate with PRC spending patterns throughout LAC. Chinese investors pump money primarily into large-scale, energy development investments, infrastructure-type projects, and extraction of valuable natural resources. Recent evidence supports this understanding, as "...Chinese banks (China Development Bank and China Export-Import Bank) have become the largest lenders in Latin America [where a]... significant amount of the lending has been for infrastructure projects, as well as for oil and gas and mining projects" (Congressional Research Service, 2019). As previously highlighted, these lending

practices by China are often dictated by bilateral agreements that exclusively use Chinese labor and place other similar stipulations, to ensure China always remains in a position of advantage.

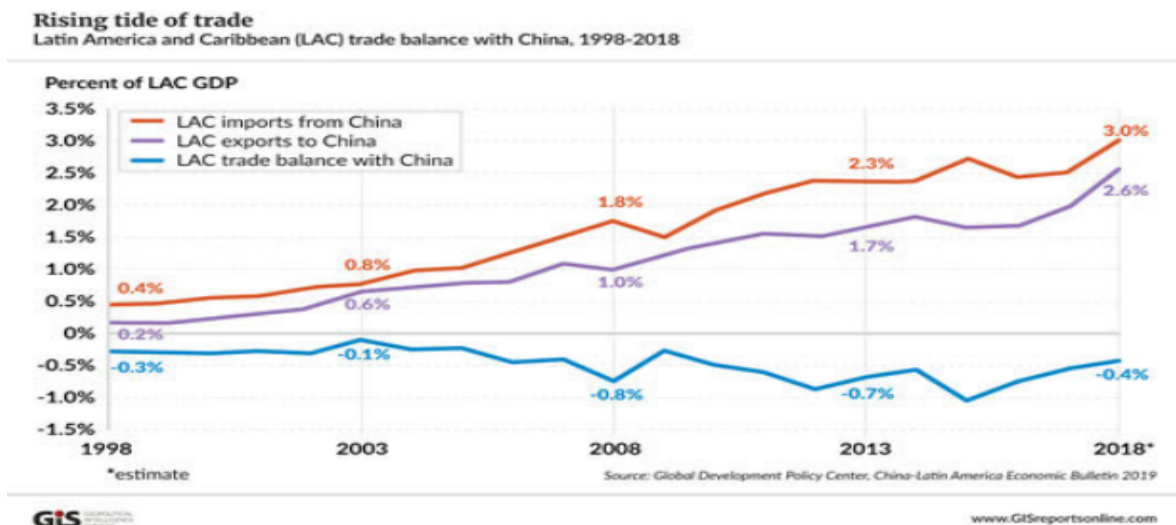
By using their own workforce and controlling key aspects of long-term agreements, China not only employs its people and boosts its economy, but it allows the CCP to export Chinese culture and influence abroad. Additionally, a growing need for natural resources and rare earth metals to fuel its manufacturing and technology sectors is one of the main drivers for the high level of infrastructure development loans and related natural extraction investments. Brazil alone has the second largest rare earth reserves in the world, making bilateral relations extremely important to the PRC. Additionally, Bolivia, rich in lithium ore deposits, has recently chosen China as its strategic partner. The reliance of the PRC on an export-oriented economic model based on infrastructure development and resource extraction, and expansion into a growing consumer goods and service industry markets, is expected to continue into the future.

In addition to the distinct economic benefits from infrastructure investment and resource extraction models, Chinese-led projects are also intended to directly advance China's foreign policy and overall investment strategy throughout the region. Extending its sphere of influence across the globe is a key goal for China's Grand Strategy in the 21st century. As part of this concerted 'soft power' strategy, China's BRI seeks to create a modern-day 'Silk Road,' where China will serve as the central hub in which all global trade is facilitated. Specifically, the regime seeks to "...broaden economic, political and cultural cooperation between the countries and regions that back it" (Koop, 2019). The BRI strategy in LAC is consistent with China's expanding ambitions. In the past five years alone, China has generated over 1.8 million jobs in

Latin America, as a result of this initiative (Koop, 2019). Even more concerning for U.S. security experts, is the fact that China is expected to increase these types of investments over the next five years, in order to fulfill the regime's "Made in China 2025" initiative. The unchecked expansion of Chinese foreign policy endeavors into LAC, driven by one-sided economic ambitions, is a threat not only to the United States, but also to other partners and allies in the region.

Although Chinese economic investment throughout LAC has been met with differing levels of acceptance, most Latin American governments see China's BRI as an opportunity. Additionally, depending on each country's preconceived perception of the United States, the level of openness and long-term economic relations with China varies. Countries like Ecuador, Venezuela, Guyana, and the Bahama's, where U.S. presence is limited in comparison to other LAC partners, have seen a considerable increase in Chinese economic investment, surpassing billions of dollars. These countries welcome the added revenue that mechanisms such as BRI bring to their economies, further increasing the likelihood of closer partnerships in the future. The relationship between the rising trade with China and the accompanying trade imbalance benefiting China is highlighted in the table below (apjjf.org, 2019). Of particular interest to U.S. and Western policy analysts, is the causal relation between the percentage in LAC GDP and the related trade deficit afflicting most LAC countries.

Table 5: Chinese Trade Balance with LAC countries, 1998-2018



While the table above highlights ‘the rising tide of trade’ with China, because such trade often comes at a price, there is increased skepticism as a result of the high level of indebtedness and financial distress encountered among the various countries that do business with the PRC. For example, Colombia, Brazil, and Costa Rica, although still very much involved in varied aspects of China’s economic frameworks, are reassessing their levels of investment with more caution. Some of these countries are also “...holding Chinese companies and investors to higher standards of corporate social responsibility than China has faced in Africa” (Cevallos, et al., 2018). Primarily, this is due to Chinese investors exhibiting a “...neglect of local labor laws, lack of environmental safeguards, lack of transparency, and questionable managerial practices...” (Jon Brandt, et al., 2012). In addition to one-sided PRC business practices, pressure from the United States to minimize Chinese influence throughout the region is beginning to affect the decision-making processes of some LAC state-actors.

Challenges regarding increased economic investments in LAC are similarly affecting China. Funding for overseas projects by the PRC has been harder to come by in recent years, as “...Chinese banks have been more cautious about issuing loans for overseas businesses such as production projects, compared to construction projects...” (Ling and Yuzhe, 2015). This is largely due to a more cautious approach in an ongoing ‘cost-benefit’ analysis, as a result of countries not able to repay mounting debts. Therefore, it can be expected that the PRC will look at balancing its level of aid against investment portfolios that ensure the highest return on investment at the lowest risk. Additionally, the U.S.-China trade war is also expected to hamper global supply chains in the region that will affect China. With the U.S. is moving “...to boost tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese goods to as much as 25 percent,” and with the PRC following suit on U.S. products, LAC countries are expected to be affected by the ongoing trade dispute (*The Dialogue, 2019*). The combination of these developing factors (e.g., more cautious loan practices by Chinese banks; mounting LAC debt; and the ongoing U.S-China trade war), are putting pressure on the system for economic efficiencies and transformative business practices.

On the one hand, increased labor costs, as well as goods prices, have already prompted major U.S. and Chinese corporations to move toward more business-friendly regions. However, these types of business movements and economic positioning by great powers is beginning to occur in LAC as well, where countries like Mexico are seeing an increase in multinational corporation (MNC) investment, while Brazil and Argentina may see gains in the agricultural sector, particularly in “...Brazilian soy and Argentine wheat...” (*The Dialogue, 2019*). These MNCs will see a huge advantage in building factories in countries near the United States, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, as it limits the need for long-distance dependency on supply chains and

transportation services. Therefore, U.S. policymakers and like-minded allies, in order to limit the effects of China's economic hold in LAC, should continue to incentivize MNCs to seek additional business opportunities in neighboring countries throughout Latin America.

Another barrier affecting the pace of China's economic influence is the ongoing crisis of intellectual property theft throughout the Western Hemisphere. In the United States alone, Chinese intellectual property theft "...has cost the United States \$225 billion to \$600 billion a year" (Huang and Smith, 2019). This is due to the fact that intangible "...assets—trade secrets, copyrights, patents, and so forth—comprise a substantial portion, if not the majority, of value for firms in the United States today," thereby making it a crucial issue for the United States (Rivette and Kline, 2000). The same applies in LAC, where intellectual property theft has also become rampant. In response, countries like Colombia, Mexico, and Peru have sought to strengthen intellectual property laws. For instance, Colombia "...passed various resolutions to simplify the intellectual property process and increase its legal coverage" (bizlatinhub.com, 2019). Likewise, Mexico has enforced "...adherence to intellectual property rights through administrative, civil and criminal actions" (bizlatinhub.com, 2019). The desire to safeguard corporate and individual patents signals a transition to a more regulatory stance for the protection of intellectual property. LAC countries recognize the negative consequences from intellectual property theft, as well as the damage it can do to FDI levels. Therefore, it is likely that stricter guidelines will become more common, particularly against Chinese investors wanting to circumvent established rules.

As a result of a more interdependent future, it is crucial that analysts also study the effects of recent pandemics, such as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), on PRC economic

policies in LAC. The spread of COVID-19 throughout China (and around the globe) has severely harmed productivity and supply-chains, both in mainland China and abroad. Several countries are afflicted by the economic downturn due to COVID-19. These economies have “...been negatively affected across numerous sectors, including exports to and imports from China, tourism, and transportation services such as airlines and trains” (Taylor, 2020). Even more concerning, particularly for LAC state-actors, is the reality that many economies are inextricably tied to Chinese manufacturing and investment. Due to the interconnected nature of global and regional trade, LAC economies are directly affected by changes in Chinese supply chains and, therefore, are influenced heavily by changes in Chinese industrial and commercial spending. This dependence-based relationship will further weaken most countries’ positions in their dealings with China, as Chinese investors will likely demand additional concessions from LAC partners to make up the loss of revenue in Asia and other parts of the world.

Table 6: Main Channels of Transmission From Shock to China Activity to Latin America

	LatAm Exposure to China			
	Trade: Exports to China	Global Commodity Prices	Trade: Supply Chain Dependence	Tourism
Argentina	Medium	High	Low	Low
Brazil	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Chile	High	High	Low	Low
Colombia	Low	High	Low	Low
Ecuador	Low	High	Low	Low
Mexico	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Peru	High	High	Low	Low

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

For Latin America specifically, as supported by the “Latin America Exposure to China” table above, countries like Brazil, Chile, and Peru are seeing exports fall dramatically. For example, Chinese purchases of Chilean goods “...fell between 50% and 60% since the coronavirus outbreak first began...” (Haldevang, 2020). Other countries have been hit hard as well due to the quarantine and shutdown of numerous businesses throughout the region and manufacturing within China. While economic analysts expect China (and the rest of the world) will eventually recover from the pandemic, the short-term outlook seems less promising, as stocks “tumbled around the world... as expanding outbreaks of the coronavirus... forced investors to reconsider the threat the virus poses to economies” (Phillips, 2020). With the DOW Jones down 900 points as of February 24th (Imbert and Huang, 2020), concerns over the long-term ability for China to economically rebound are beginning to creep into the public fray.

For the affected LAC economies, the current trend in the rise of global pandemics will mean having to diversify trade portfolios in an effort to curb the economic consequences brought upon by an overreliance of Chinese products and investments. Strategically significant countries like Brazil, Chile and Mexico are expected to find replacement purchasers for both short-term and long-term prospects. Likewise, the PRC will seek to aggressively contain the adverse economic and health-related effects of COVID-19, or risk a massive decrease in manufacturing, labor productivity, and foreign investment streams. As previously highlighted, the PRC will undoubtedly use its vast economic and political influence in the region to ensure it maintains favorable terms of trade at any cost. It is expected that China will continue to seek additional economic and geopolitical concessions from LAC countries to make up the difference in revenue loss resulting from pandemics such as COVID-19.

VIII. LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

While the United States has not placed strategic emphasis on the region over the past two decades, “...China has been discretely carrying out a far-reaching plan of its own across Latin America. It has vastly expanded trade, bailed out governments, built enormous infrastructure projects, strengthened military ties and locked up tremendous amounts of resources, hitching the fate of several countries in the region to its own” (Londono, 2018). By making itself crucial, China has secured its relevance in the region for generations to come. Looking into the future, it is clear that the United States and China will continue to compete for influence in the region. As a result, most regional experts believe that long-term, close cooperation between the United States and China is untenable due to the marked differences between the two. Yet, the best future for the region as a whole, is for the United States to take on a more active leadership role based on interdependence, cooperation and mutually beneficial outcomes. Theoretically, this future would closely align with the one proposed by Robert Keohane, where multilateral ties between the United States, its allies, and LAC countries would be so closely interconnected, that Chinese involvement in the region would be mandated to follow established LIO norms.

As previously outlined in the monograph, the incorporation of key aspects from various theoretical IR approaches into the overall analysis of U.S.-China great power competition and its effect on Latin America is essential. A comprehensive theoretical look, ranging from neorealist tenets to neoliberalist and constructivist thought, provides a sound foundation to anchor the analysis. The understanding of a neorealist, rational actor model provides fundamental insight as to why some LAC countries continue to partner with China under predatory conditions. Added

emphasis into neoliberalist and constructivist theories, particularly those that incorporate both normative principles and power politics dynamics, help round out the analysis. A comprehensive theoretical review based on the aforementioned characteristics, among other relevant elements, is a prudent way to look at the problem since it incorporates various domestic and IR factors, ranging from intrastate to interstate state-actor decision making, to relations among great powers and LAC actors alike. The assimilation of these theoretical approaches (neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, constructivism) into the research allows for a more complete understanding from which U.S. policy-makers and Western allies can consider various policy outcomes.

However, in order to arrive at a more interdependent future for the region, the gradual integration of convergent factors and mutually supportive, multilateral mechanisms must take preeminence over today's divergent, zero-sum regional dynamics based on U.S.-China great power competition. The efficacy of the various theoretical approaches and the causal relationship to transition to a more interdependent future in LAC must be weighed against the likely foreign policy considerations that the United States and its allies could implement through a DIME lens. The United States, as the preeminent hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, must continue to provide regional leadership and work with LAC countries, multilateral forums, NGOs, and willing partners and allies, to create a connected economic and interdependent future, while keeping pace with disparate great power regional objectives, rational actor dynamics, and normative values that guide external state actor and LAC decision-making.

Diplomatically, the United States should aim to reinstate previously ratified regional agreements, such as the Union of South American Nations (USAN). The USAN functioned as a

“forum for interaction between member-country leaders and also served as a platform for interregional trade promotion” (Flannery, 2012). yet, in order to operate as a ‘EU-esque’ type framework, this entity would need greater emphasis in both economic and diplomatic realms. Similarly to how the European Union functions in Europe, a higher, overarching political and economic governance structure is necessary to bring LAC countries together under unifying, democratic guidelines. One manner in which such a structure could be attained is through the implementation of multilateral mechanisms similar to those instituted by like-minded allies in the Asia-Pacific and Europe, along with more open borders and the lessening of trade barriers.

The concept of a more regionally aligned Latin America has been considered in the past, however, dedicated support for the level required to affect regional change toward a more interdependent future has yet to arise. For a more regionally-aligned future to occur, active sponsorship by the United States and Western democracies is required. From a U.S. perspective, the short-term political and economic costs associated with underwriting such a system is balanced by regional stability and sustainable economic growth. Additionally, since the structure would be backed by the United States and its allies to benefit the region as a whole, such an endeavor would present the United States and other democratically elected allies in a more positive light. The up-front investment required by the United States and other Western democracies to help reinvigorate the region would be a prudent investment to long-term stability and growth, while maximizing the benefits to participating states.

In addition to re-establishing a commitment to interdependent, regional frameworks, the United States, its regional allies, and strategically significant LAC countries should increase

resources provided to viable NGOs. These organizations, when resourced properly, are able to function as international ‘watchdogs’ for democratic regimes against illegal activity. Supporting NGOs that provide value-added to peace, security, and prosperity, allows the United States, its allies, and participating LAC countries the flexibility to share the responsibility for halting illegal activities and to lessen the level of malign influence in the region (e.g., rampant corruption, transnational organized crime, rogue state-actors, illegal Chinese activity, etc.). The use of NGOs as a policy tool to combat corruption and illegal activities, as well as to counter undue influence by China, is sought as an important mechanism to advance a more interconnected future. The absence of a serious commitment by the United States and other Western democracies to support regional NGOs and other relevant multilateral organizations has resulted in China filling the void by providing grants to NGOs and selected universities and industry consortiums, to advance its regional ambitions and growing influence in the developing world.

A relevant example that illustrates the power of up-front investment in NGOs by the United States and its allies is that of the Charles Darwin Foundation in Ecuador, which is responsible for the protection of the Galapagos Islands and its wildlife. Recently, the foundation has grown increasingly wary of Chinese fishing vessels encroaching on the sanctuary’s perimeter boundaries. As night falls, Chinese fishing vessels raid the protected waters, leaving early in the morning. Specifically, and further illustrated in the image below, the Chinese fishing fleet consists of “...245 units comprising fishing boats, factory and supply vessels, which move in the vicinity of the archipelago for the third consecutive year...” (fis.com, 2019). These illegal excursions by Chinese vessels coincide with the time period in which the local ocean radar shuts down for the day. Figure 10 below depicts the radar data accumulated during daylight hours,

showing the vast protected areas of ocean around the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador’s sovereign maritime exclusion zone. The image captures almost 200 Chinese fishing vessels standing just outside of Ecuador’s Economic Exclusion Zone and the protected areas in the Galapagos.

Figure 10: Illegal Chinese Fishing Excursions in the Galapagos Islands



Source: www.fis.com

Not only are these unlawful infiltrations by Chinese-flagged vessels deliberate, but they are also conducted in direct contradiction to the PRC’s unifying rhetoric as a ‘benign hegemon.’ Despite China claiming it represents the interests of all LAC governments, its egregious actions throughout the region prove otherwise. Instead of trying to counter the number of one-sided bilateral agreements between China and various Latin American countries like Ecuador, the United States and its allies, should actively cooperate with other regional leaders to increase the

level of funding that organizations such as the Charles Darwin Foundation receive. Should this occur, the foundation would be better positioned to assist the Ecuadorian government and the region to highlight and combat the illegal Chinese fishing activities in these protected waters.

In addition to the economic and political leverage the United States garners from taking a more active role in the region, the increased level of support advances democratic values and the LIO. Additional tangible effects can also be expected. Specifically, a more proactive U.S. role in the region, based on mutual cooperation, would result in a renewed Latin American affinity away from Sino-dependency and toward democratic ideals. What is sought is a change from the LAC inclination of associating ambivalent action and ‘benign neglect’ with the United States. This shift is also desired to reconcile a history of U.S. interventionism and imperialism. Historical events such as Operation Condor, the Banana Wars, and the Bay of Pigs failure, to name a few, have all contributed to deeply embedded feelings of resentment toward the United States. It is this historical inclination, along with a painful past of colonialism due to Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and British domination, that keeps the LAC struggle very much alive today. Specifically, a multi-generational experience marked by enslavement; racism and subjugation; land barons and caudillos and brutal military dictatorships; and the rise of the entitled elite at the expense of the LAC peoples, make a convergent future with the West a challenging undertaking.

The indigeneous LAC experience of having endured multi-generational oppression at the hands of white European and American imperialist powers is the Achilles heel that external state actors like China and authoritarian regimes use to ferment the rise of the left. The tool of choice by many malign actors is to use concerted messaging in social, digital, and print media to evoke

recurring themes of discord, class struggle and instability in order to maintain the status quo and undermine U.S. influence and democratic governance in the region. In light of the wave of populism and civil unrest that spread throughout Latin America during 2019 (figure 11 below) due to “...weak institutions, structural inequality, political polarization and a corrupt ruling class unwilling to cede power,” China will continue to cast itself as a benign hegemon and the ‘partner of choice’ in LAC (Faiola and Krygier, 2019). However, China’s actions are directly opposite to its rhetoric. Ultimately, the PRC’s strategy in the region and throughout the developing world revolves around the preservation of regime survival at home and abroad by seeking to achieve “rejuvenation” and regime legitimacy abroad through diplomatic and economic manipulation.

Figure 11: 2019 Unrest in South America

2019 unrest in South America

Venezuela: Demonstrations against a socialist government accused of election fraud, economic collapse, and failure of water and energy systems.

Ecuador: Union, student and indigenous protests against IMF-backed austerity measures.

Peru: Demonstrations supporting the president’s effort to shut down a congress widely seen as corrupt.

Bolivia: Opposition protests against a socialist government accused of election fraud.

Chile: Youth-initiated demonstrations against cost-of-living pressures and income inequality.

Argentina: Protests against economic crisis, inflation and rising food prices.



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Although the rise of the left does not fare well for democratic governance in the near-term due to a loss of confidence in elected officials (as a result of rampant corruption and class inequality), in the long-term, the LIO will endure over the CCP's inherently flawed strategy of wanting to legitimize its authoritarian system on a global scale. Many experts agree that the CCP's strategy will not persevere because it is essentially counter to the type of interdependent future required to elevate the region above 'grand' corruption and bribery. Corruption represents the most complex problem in the region, affecting every aspect of LAC society, as "Corruption retards development, undermines human rights and freedom, and perpetuates social exclusion and poverty" (Barco, et al, 2018). Corruption is also 'the key' element that a CCP strategy relies on to advance its interests. Similarly, the PRC's approach to multilateralism is based on the pursuit of one-sided mechanisms at the expense of LAC countries (e.g., 'debt-trap diplomacy'; leveraging weak governance and political polarization to undermine the LIO; exerting control over the information domain; and securing unequal agreements ranging from resource extraction to long-term access to strategic assets such as deep-water ports and dual-use technologies).

As a result of China's foreign policy revolving around authoritarian tenets of corruption and economic manipulation, from a constructivist perspective, the United States should aim to establish a Kantian model of anarchy in the region, as well as regional norms and related mechanisms that support a new U.S. perception away from interventionism and historical imperialism, and toward one of sustained leadership to benefit all peoples of LAC. Furthermore, U.S. officials should be cognizant of constructivist values inherent in LAC countries. One example of this can be seen between Chile and Bolivia, where Chile's neoliberal, national disposition was perceived by both Bolivia and Peru as "...an imperialist and aggressive actor and

as an enemy of the Bolivian and Peruvian people” (van der Ree, 2010). This example highlights ideological differences that can produce distinct rivalries between neighboring countries, even if the rivalry contradicts rationalistic notions of interstate competition.

The recognition of constructivist factors is an important consideration to the research since these normative elements are just as important to LAC countries as materialistic aspects of the international system. Therefore, U.S. foreign-policy advisors should widen their theoretical scope beyond materialistic interests when working with LAC partners and allies. The United States should see this theoretical gap as an opportunity to correct flawed regional approaches and focus on highlighting both normative and materialistic aspects of U.S. regional cooperation. This would contrast greatly with current PRC strategies, as Chinese involvement can be currently characterized “...as narrowly mercantilist at best and devoid of moral content at worst” (Alden and Large, Pg. 130). Should the United States opt to not consider these types of theoretical elements in the application to its foreign policy, and the PRC elect to pursue a more ‘mutually beneficial’ approach in its messaging (supported by real action on the ground), it could serve to undermine U.S. influence in the region--which is exactly what China seeks in its grand strategy.

With respect to the protection of the information domain, the United States--with the help of the international community--must ensure the safety of unrestricted, free flow of information in the region. The recent creation of the United States Space Force (USSF) signifies a strong desire by the United States to address this issue, as cyberspace defense will be essential, particularly when working with partner-nations throughout LAC. Accordingly, the United States and its allies should assist state-actors and multilateral organizations to develop their defensive

capabilities to guard against a growing number of cyber attacks and other intrusion mechanisms. Regardless of whether these attacks originate from the public or private sectors or from external state actors like Iran or the CCP, a U.S.- led, regional counter-strategy must be comprehensive enough to limit the damage caused by such attacks. Collectively countering the manipulation of information by China, as well as covert cyber warfare operations in LAC, is critical to U.S. national security and to the growth of young democracies, rule of law and freedom of speech.

Additionally, an increase in Chinese controlled media in the daily lives of LAC citizens represents a perceived level of neglectfulness by the United States. Therefore, it is evident that much of the United States' strategy in the region, with regard to promoting the free flow of information and unrestricted access to all, rests in the ability to limit the ease at which China can assimilate a conglomeration of Chinese-friendly countries from LAC into its sphere. Moving forward, the United States will need to take a more prominent role in this arena, with the assistance of partners and allies in the region, to help safeguard the unbiased use of information and of democracy as a whole. Furthermore, the United States will also need to mount a concerted campaign to highlight the numerous illegal surveillance technologies and related seditious and nefarious activities that the PRC continues to foster within and among various LAC countries.

The United States will need to garner multilateral support in hindering the ease at which Chinese surveillance and data-collecting mechanisms spread throughout the region. As such, the establishment of joint 5G network consortiums prior to China should be a priority. While the United States will need to work closely with like-minded partners to limit Chinese access to resources and infrastructure which may aid Chinese implementation of 5G technology, it will

ultimately be in the United States' best interest to secure this technological advancement even if it results in the United States having to act unilaterally. While some of these options may seem aggressive to some, reality shows that the "...future landscape of warfare and cybersecurity could be fundamentally changed by 5G" (Zhen, 2019). Furthermore, 5G technologies provide countries with almost instantaneous advancements in economic, manufacturing and military capabilities. Whichever country reaches control of this strategic medium first will inevitably have a massive advantage in the region and in the international system.

Based on the information provided on Chinese cyber capabilities throughout LAC, it is evident that the United States must be more adaptable in the realm of cybersecurity. U.S. policymakers seem to be aware of this reality, as the creation of the USSF signals an understanding within Congress on the dangers of cyberspace operations from neo-revisionist states like China and Russia. In addition to "...developing military space professionals, acquiring military space systems, (and) maturing the military doctrine for space power," the USSF is also responsible for developing leading technologies in the cyberspace domain in an effort to combat against asymmetrical information and cyber attacks. The need for effective counter-measures against China's cyber capabilities are exemplified in LAC, particularly in strategic countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico. In recent years, these countries have been prone to cyber attacks, as the PRC's likely "...targets for such access operations include command and control (C2) infrastructure of potential military adversaries and government communication systems" (Green, et al., 2019). China's cyber offensive in Latin America carries with it drastic foreign policy and cyber security implications for the United States and allies in the region.

Close military-to-military relations between the United States and LAC partners are crucial in preventing an unbalanced PLA military presence in the region. Therefore, “...optimal U.S. military activity for achieving national objectives in the region...” should be through increasing security cooperation initiatives (Ellis, 2019). Specifically, ‘security cooperation’ encompasses “...all activities undertaken by the Department of Defense (DoD) to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives” (DSCA.mil, 2019). The United States military, working closely with other Western allies and partner nation militaries, must continue to foster bilateral and multilateral security cooperation mechanisms throughout the region. Security cooperation initiatives also closely align with a Keohanian, interdependent, regional system. By making the United States the premier partner for military cooperation, the incentive for vulnerable countries to expose themselves to increased military influence by China is lessened. Additionally, shared U.S.-LAC defense objectives not only advance common interests aimed at improved peace and security, but similarly, these actions serve as a counter-weight to Latin America’s turbulent history of military dictatorships.

Similarly to closer defense ties, the United States should strive to increase the number of foreign military officers participating in U.S. education and training programs. Specifically, the United States should allocate additional funding to the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program (capped by Congress to around \$11 million for the entire region). The program “...provides training and education on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations,” and spreads U.S. values to foreign militaries (USDS, 2009). Additionally, in order to provide greater training and education exchange opportunities to LAC partner nation military

(PN) personnel, the program should also look into broadening the types of activities included. Accordingly, USSOUTHCOM, in implementing its mil-to-mil activities throughout the region, should continue to advocate for international training and additional educational opportunities for PN military personnel. Senior officers in foreign militaries wield considerable influence in their services and, as such, should be regularly exposed to U.S. military professionalism. U.S.-led security cooperation activities not only strengthen mil-to-mil relations, but more strategically significantly, they help spread liberal, democratic values and peace and stability in the region.

In the economic realm, the United States must recognize that China's assertive role in LAC correlates with a decrease in U.S. commitment to the region. A historical inability to invest sufficiently in LAC infrastructure projects and the growing economies of young democracies has forced many countries to rely solely on Chinese investment mechanisms. Economic figures show that China has invested "...roughly \$150 billion loaned to Latin American countries since 2005 [and] ...90% percent of that has gone to boosting the region's energy, infrastructure and mining sectors" (Nathanson, 2018). Although the PRC clearly has the lead in infrastructure investment and energy sector projects, U.S. foreign policy must emphasize increased bilateral and regional cooperation in order to reinvigorate sustainable economic development in the 21st century. Additionally, with the recent U.S.-China trade war and COVID-19, the United States should continue to encourage U.S. companies to move industries from mainland China and toward neighboring LAC countries to incentivize the regional economy.

As previously affirmed, predatory economic practices by China throughout the region are considered a U.S. national security threat and a real problem for other Western democracies and

LAC countries affected by such practices. Therefore, it has become a primary concern for U.S. policymakers to find ways to mitigate the prevalence of the unchecked economic PRC influence in the region. Direct competition with China from an infrastructure and investment perspective is unrealistic and unsustainable over the longer term. This is primarily due to the fact that Chinese investors receive direct support from CCP government officials, and have the ability to directly invest up to several billion dollars in local economies without the types of restrictions encumbered in the West. Additionally, as part of its competitiveness and multi-generation grand strategy, China will continue to use its ‘soft power’ advantage for political leverage, and to challenge U.S. hegemony in the region--closest to the United States’ sphere of influence.

While the United States can not compete with Chinese FDI in LAC, it does have the upper hand in its financial sector and overall reputation. As previously outlined, Chinese investors have developed a reputation for being ‘untrustworthy,’ as their one-sided agreements typically result in default of loan repayments by participating nations. LAC countries often have to lease out strategic ports and provinces or grant extraction concessions for vital natural resources in order to repay their loans. As a result, U.S. and other Western investors have begun developing a counter-framework that revolves around illuminating the various pitfalls in Chinese economic investment. Specifically, by highlighting that the ‘free money’ that LAC countries receive is anything but, it allows for U.S. and other Western investment vehicles an opportunity to compete. However, should the United States and its allies fail to counter China’s aggressive economic moves, a surge in Sino-LAC economic dominance is inevitable.

IX. CONCLUSION

Robert Keohane's Neoliberal Institutionalism provides an essential theoretical framework to better align disparate U.S.-China and LAC foreign policy objectives. A transition from a post-Cold War, unipolar world (United States as the undisputed hegemon) to an international system moving toward an unbalanced multipolar world (opposing great powers with unequal strengths such as China and Russia directly challenging the United States), requires a revision of current strategies. For its part, "Unbalanced multipolarity is an especially unstable condition, and the United States is not effectively postured to manage that instability" (Cropsey and McGrath, 2018). In his seminal 2014 book, *World Order*, Henry Kissinger further expands on the transition to multipolarity and "divides the concept of world order into two parts: a normative system that defines acceptable action, and a 'balance of power' arrangement that punishes the breach of such conventions" (Cropsey and McGrath, 2018). Although conventional thinking agrees that the international system is in a 'power' transition (with structural factors as essential elements in IR), often missed is the relevance of intrastate and interstate normative dynamics to foreign policy implementation and the crucial role that globalization factors, mutual cooperation, NGOs, multilateral institutions, and other regional mechanisms play in an interdependent future.

The counterbalancing threat of a divergent LAC future in which neo-revisionist great powers, malign actors, illegitimate regimes, and criminal transnational organizations all promote their self-interests under an environment of persistent corruption, calls for a thorough assessment of current policies against the need for strategic realignment. The implementation of disparate, zero-sum, U.S.-China foreign policy objectives must move to a more interdependent future in

which regional considerations and the needs of other participating LAC actors take center stage. To protect its economic and national security interests, and those of its allies and partners, the United States must take on a more proactive leadership role in the region. The tacit support of NGOs and multilateral mechanisms is also essential to more effectively react to the dynamic changes in the region and promote LAC development. These various mechanisms, along with a long-term commitment by the United States and other regional leaders, provide an initial structure for the realization of a more interdependent future, characterized by closer diplomatic and economic relations, hemispheric cooperation, and shared responsibility across the region.

Yet, the admission for the need to transition to an interdependent, regional framework based on multilateralism exposes the current limitations, primarily those of the United States' capabilities. To date, the historical reliance of the United States on unilateral action has proven ineffective in slowing down the pace of China's political and economic influence in the region. With greater Chinese aspirations in an increasingly multipolar world, the United States understands that it can no longer expect to unilaterally dictate the terms of international and regional systems in the same manner it did during the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, the transition away from a LAC system characterized by 'benign neglect' by the United States, to one that shares proactive U.S. leadership and regional responsibilities among various state-actors and NGOs is crucial to preventing China from becoming the regional hegemon.

By looking at U.S. - Chinese great power competition through a DIME lens, it is evident that taking a solely realist perspective to future interactions in the region is flawed. One can see that regimes in "...South America conduct their foreign policy as if the most serious long-term

threat they face is neither war nor domination by an aspiring regional hegemon, but domestic failure and external marginalization” (Merke, Pg. 9). Therefore, neoliberal tenets and multilateral policies aid state-actors that reside within LAC in pursuing a set of common interests through regional and international organizations. However, even neoliberalism fails to grasp the complexity and level of importance of regional norms and principles, particularly in such an interconnected region. LAC countries have “...evolved beyond the typical dynamics of balance of power, namely arms races, alliances and war,” in which societal factors and conflict resolution typically have the greatest influence on regional disputes (Kacowicz 1988; Holsti 1996). As a result of this LAC reality, purely realist or liberal considerations alone are not sufficient to address the aforementioned dynamics since both fail to grasp the region’s complex arrangement of material and non-material factors.

This interdependent arrangement of factors, particularly in Latin America, is known as *concertación*, in which regional, normative structures have allowed LAC countries the ability to mitigate conflicts through diplomatic manners, effectively establishing a framework that advocates for regional cooperation, while still reinforcing existing theories of sovereignty. This inherent “...regional institutional structure and regional norms... generate(s) very few incentives to go to war,” yet still generates issues of minor military, diplomatic and economic conflict (Merke, Pg. 11). LAC countries exhibit these regional behaviors closely, supporting the case that English constructivist schools of IR theory are also contributing theoretical approaches from which to anchor the research. Therefore, U.S and other Western government policymakers, in close collaboration with LAC countries, should be wary of falling into the materialistic trap of

exclusively relying on realism or neo-liberalism tenets. Instead, allowance for a greater degree of theoretical inclusivity, to include constructivist-based regional approaches, must be considered.

Regional great power competition between the United States and China will continue to be one of the most pressing and complex issues of the 21st century. Evidence of this is explicit in LAC, as both the United States and China continue to vie for diplomatic, informational, military, and economic influence throughout the region. Accordingly, Dr. Henry Kissinger, in a recent conversation at the Wilson Center with Ambassador J. Stapleton Roy, affirmed this notion, referring to Sino-U.S. relations as:

“...the key problem of our time. Each of us is strong enough to create situations around the world in which it can impose its preferences, but the importance of the relationship will be whether each side can believe that they have achieved enough to be compatible with their convictions and with their histories” (Wilson Center, 2018).

From the perspective of great power competition, success, or failure in securing regional influence will determine whether or not the status of a hegemon is consistent with a multipolar future. The overreliance on a unilateral framework that fails to account for the interdependent interests of opposing realities like those of China and U.S. partners and allies alike, only weakens the United States’ overall position in the region and in the international system.

In order for the United States to retain the current liberal world order and maintain its status as the preeminent leader of the Western hemisphere and the international system, it will need to set in place a foreign policy strategy that directly incorporates cooperative mechanisms among like-minded partners and allies, both in the region and across the world. Therefore, it is

crucial that the United States continues to engage with China in matters of mutual interest while directly investing in regional and multinational frameworks and NGOs that both lessen the burden of responsibility on any one actor and strengthen existing relations between the United States and its partners and allies. Latin America should be the first region in which the United States implements such an interdependent, multilateral system, being that the region often suffers long-term bouts of instability and is in the United States' own sphere of influence. Active U.S. regional leadership based on interdependence, close multilateral cooperation and beneficial outcomes with China in areas of common agreement is sought as the best future for the region.

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