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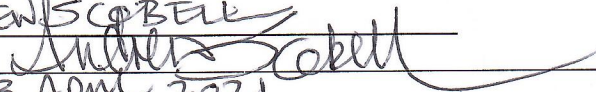
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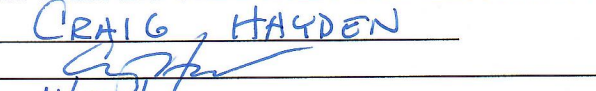
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** China's Greatest Challenge in Latin America: Uncle Sam

**Author:** Merlyn Schultz, Marine Corps Command and Staff College

**Thesis:** China's increasing investment in Latin America as evidenced by the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); the rising number of Confucius Institutes; new international broadcasting efforts in Spanish to reach Latin Americans; and new military agreements that significantly surpass the scope of any made to date increase Beijing's influence in the region. However, China faces vigorous competition from the United States who has recently redoubled its economic strategic approach through a newly formed agency, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), stemming from the BUILD Act, and passed by the United States Congress in 2018. The merger includes a Latin America specific initiative "América Crece", of which ten countries have already joined, to foster private sector investment with the aim of lifting women and youth into entrepreneurship. Although Confucius Institutes are quickly on the rise and China is hosting more Latin American students, it pales in comparison to the cultural exchanges with the United States through the United States Department of State (DOS) Binational Centers, of which there are currently 111 throughout the region. In addition, according to the 2020 Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange, Mexico and Brazil are among the top ten places of origin for international students in the United States. Shaping their narratives requires outreach through traditional and social media. On the one hand, China launched its first Spanish channel in 2004 through China Central Television (CCTV), now referred to as China Global Television Network (CGTN). On the other, the United States has maintained Voice of America (VOA) in the region for sixty-one years with over sixty million viewers on a weekly basis. Lastly, on the security cooperation front, while China focuses on training and weapons sales, both the DOS and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) are increasingly focused on helping Latin American partners counter the smuggling of drugs and people; an issue that literally hits close to home given the connecting geographic borders between the United States and Mexico, which serve as an entry point for illicit activity. Finally, a Peru case study provides a deep-dive into the China – United States competition that continues to unfold in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic which has created an opportunity for both to execute humanitarian diplomacy.

**Conclusion:** This paper will provide a comprehensive series of benchmarks for future analysis to quantify the reach of Beijing's influence in the economic, cultural, and security realms of Latin America.

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## *Preface*

This research paper is the culmination of an opportunity to examine the reach of China's foreign policy as a U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer, at the Marine Corps University, Command and Staff College. I would like to thank my mentors on this paper, Dr. Scobell and Dr. Hayden, for their guidance and encouragement throughout the process. I'd especially like to thank my husband who cared for our newborn son and daughter amid a COVID-19 pandemic while I plugged away behind closed doors for hours on end. Finally, I'd like to thank my colleagues at the U.S. Department of State who took the time to share their experiences and on-the-ground context for this paper. You inspire me every day to tell our story.

## INTRODUCTION

China is the world's second-largest economy<sup>1</sup> after the United States, and the largest exporter by value.<sup>2</sup> In Latin America, it has bolted ahead of the United States as the top trade partner for Brazil, Chile, and Peru.<sup>3</sup> A key component of its reach is the BRI, which has provided a pathway to expand its economic influence through infrastructure investment. Beyond the economic sphere, China is finding interest among youth towards its cultural and language programs, spurring a dramatic rise in Confucius Institutes during the past fifteen years. China's military cooperation has also expanded rapidly with selected countries in the region, ranging from cross forces training to weapon sales.

Despite the notable economic, social, and security advances in the region, China faces vigorous competition from the United States. This paper will examine the different strategies of Chinese influence in Latin America and the United States competing efforts, including a Latin America specific initiative "América Crece", established in 2018 by the United States Congress, with the aim of lifting women and youth through entrepreneurship. Although Confucius Institutes are quickly on the rise, there are currently 111 Binational Centers administered by the United States Department of State "American Spaces" program throughout the region. Established in 1929, Binational Centers provide information on studying in the United States - a top choice destination for Latin American students. According to the 2020 Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange, Mexico and Brazil are among the top ten places of origin for international students in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, on the security cooperation front, both DOS and DOD are close allies to partners in the region in countering the smuggling of drugs and people; an issue that hits close to home given the connecting geographic borders between the United States and Mexico, which serve as an entry point for illicit activity.

Finally, this paper also includes a case study on Peru, where China is its top trading partner with 29.2% of its total exports. The case study examines how China interacts with Peru's citizens and government in the economic, cultural, environment, security, media, and academic spheres. Moreover, how China has played a role in the Government of Peru's (GoP) COVID-19 efforts. Peru has been among the hardest hit countries with the virus in Latin America, causing an immediate lockdown that shocked its economy.

### CHINA: ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

On April 26, 2019, at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres fully acknowledged the potential for BRI projects stating "...the world needs to take profit of the Belt and Road Initiative to help close significant financing gaps for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the developing world, in particular, the need for about \$1 trillion needed for infrastructure investments in developing countries."<sup>5</sup> Infrastructure is a serious challenge in Latin America with sixty percent of the region's roads unpaved. According to the World Bank, Latin America spends a smaller share of its GDP on infrastructure than any other region except sub-Saharan Africa. As governments in the region turn to the private sector for funding, U.S. firms account for only 2% of constructions' roles in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> China has filled the gap through over \$141 billion in loans since 2005 with 90 percent directed to Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina.<sup>7</sup> Lending from China between 2007 and 2017 outpaced similar lending from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.<sup>8</sup> At the top of China's investment strategy is the BRI.

President Xi Jinping announced the BRI during a visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 where he laid out a vision of investment focused on infrastructure, including roads, rail, airports,

ports, pipelines, and communications to construct road and sea connections between China and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and through to Europe.<sup>9</sup> Four years later, Beijing extended the BRI to Latin America as a “natural extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.”<sup>10</sup> According to the United States House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs report, *China Regional Snapshot: South America*, the unfolding of the BRI in Latin America began with Panama after it cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of China only five months earlier in 2017. Nineteen countries in the region that have signed onto the BRI and Chinese State-Owned Enterprises make up 80% of Chinese investments in Latin America.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this research paper, the economic reach of the BRI will be examined; however, it must be noted that it does not tell the full story. Non-BRI countries, including some of the largest players in the region, such as Mexico and Brazil, have significant Chinese investments.

LATIN AMERICAN (LA) BRI COUNTRIES	CARIBBEAN (C) BRI COUNTRIES	NON-BRI LAC COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT* CHINESE INVESTMENTS
Bolivia	Antigua and Barbuda	Argentina
Chile	Barbados	Brazil
Costa Rica	Dominica	Colombia
Cuba	Grenada	Mexico
Dominican Republic	Guyana	
Ecuador	Jamaica	
El Salvador	Suriname	
Panama	Trinidad and Tobago	
Peru		
Uruguay		
Venezuela		

■ Memorandum of Understanding signed    
■ Document of Cooperation or Diplomatic Relations Document signed

\* Significant where Chinese investment > US\$1 billion in the 2008–2018 period, as per the Global China Investment Tracker  
Source: News sources

**Figure 1: China’s economic reach expands beyond BRI deals**

Source: Andre Dabus, Meghna Basu, Leon Yao, “China’s Belt and Road reaches Latin America”, *Brink*, <https://www.brinknews.com/chinas-belt-and-road-reaches-latin-america/>

The broader approach of the BRI is rooted in Chinese foreign policy for over a decade in Central Asia and initially fueled by President Xi's aim to change China's relations with its neighbors.<sup>12</sup> On the surface, investment deals seem like a "win-win," particularly for developing countries with high unemployment and a lack of investment opportunities. However, the win stops short when "Chinese manufactured goods in the region and in its traditional export markets such as the United States affect competing Latin American firms and contribute to people losing their jobs."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, countries are strapped into repayment loans for 50, sometimes up to 100 years. Navy Admiral Craig Faller, head of U.S. Southern Command cites a recent deal with a country in the Caribbean in which China agreed to build a road across the country in return for rights to "thousands of acres" of land bordering the road and "the ability to control the tolls on that road for the next 99 years." He notes "that's the price you get for having the Chinese come in and build a road across the country."<sup>14</sup>

The Chinese practice of gaining influence through loans has been called "debt-trap" diplomacy. For some BRI countries, these debts are unsustainable.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Department of State published *The Elements of the China Challenge*, which states host countries, regardless of region, increasingly find these BRI projects unsustainable. For example, as a result of China's predatory development program and debt-trap diplomacy, Sri Lanka lost control of a major port after defaulting on a burdensome loan.<sup>16</sup> Concerned with this image, China's Ministry of Finance presented a "BRI Debt Sustainability Framework" to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global arm of 190 countries, charged with promoting international financial stability and monetary cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Beijing counters a predator narrative by funding China-IMF Capacity Development Centers, headquartered in China with training centers in Shenzhen and Dalian, to help train development officials and support the BRI.<sup>18</sup> To further feed a positive

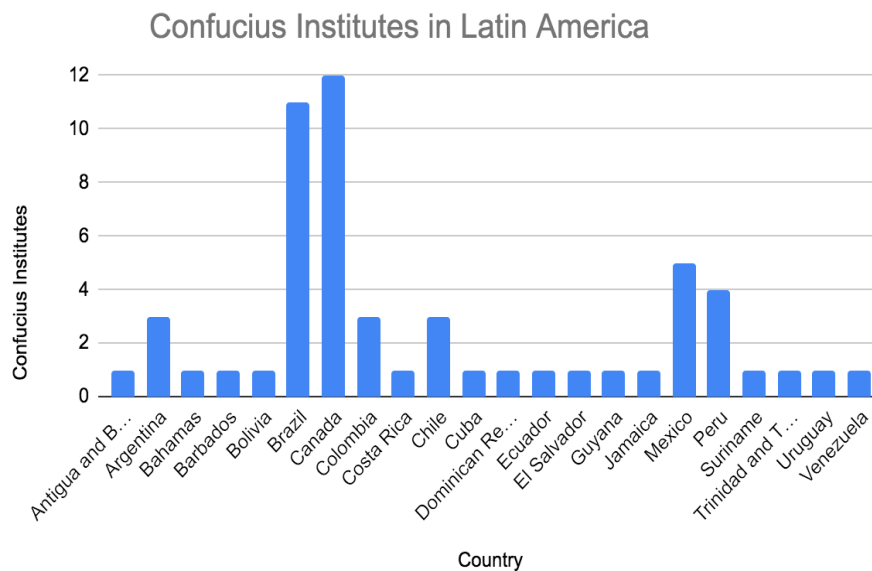
image, China has committed to helping developing countries through 100 “happy campus” projects to “finance the schooling of poor girls and raise girls’ school enrollment rates. It will also host 30,000 women from developing countries to take part in training programs in China and provide 100,000 skills training opportunities in local communities of other developing countries.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the majority of attention is focused on infrastructure investment from the BRI, the initiative includes five “pillars”: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people connectivity.<sup>20</sup> China has been equally focused on cultivating a positive image through people-to-people connections, also known as “Soft Power”, a term coined by Joseph S. Nye in 1990 to depict the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion rather than just coercion and payment.

#### CHINA: SOFT POWER INFLUENCE

In Ellis’s *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America*, he highlights a growing interest in people-to-people connectivity through Chinese culture as evidenced by the expansion of Confucius Institutes. “Confucius Institutes...push out skewed Chinese language and cultural training...as part of Beijing’s multifaceted propaganda efforts.”<sup>21</sup> Programs range from Chinese language to cultural studies and programs. Ellis cites a rapid rise since February 2006 with the first Institute in Mexico City. As of 2017, there are thirty-nine institutes and nineteen Confucius classrooms in 20 countries across the region.<sup>22</sup> Although institutes are popping up rapidly, program and attendance numbers remain relatively small. China hosts a small number of cultural and academic exchanges where “only 100 of 20,000 foreign recipients of government scholarships to study in China in 2010 came from Latin America.”<sup>23</sup> Although these exchanges are small, Confucius Institutes report larger numbers.

Administrators state that over 100,000 Latin American students are enrolled in Confucius Institute language programs with over one million engaging through cultural programs and workshops each year.<sup>24</sup> The rising presence of institutes is in step with the rising number of Latin American students choosing to study in China. As of 2017, there were 2,200 studying in Chinese universities, accounting for roughly 1.5% of all international students.<sup>25</sup> This is a sizable increase from 2009 when the Chinese Ministry of Education reported no Latin American presence among 77,715 international students, which included South Korea (35,353), Japan (12,765), the United States (3,693), Vietnam (3,478), and Indonesia (2,563) as the top five sending countries. Countries with at least 1,000 students that year included Thailand (1,554), Germany (1,280), Russia (1,224), Nepal (1,199), and Mongolia (1,060).<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 2: Confucius Institutes in Western Hemisphere (including Canada)**  
*Source:* <http://www.hanban.org> (Last Accessed February 3, 2021)

Lastly, China is ramping up international broadcasting efforts in Latin America through audio-visual elements, including its very own China Central Television (CCTV) (now China Global Television Network - CGTN). Headquartered in Brazil and broadcasted via satellite and

cable, CCTV has around the clock programming with news and cultural shows, including the production of drama series, “in order to take advantage of the popularity of the telenovela genre in the region.”<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, its campaign focus to win hearts and minds appears to be centered on in-person connections, to include military counterparts.

### CHINA: SECURITY COOPERATION

China’s military agreements in Latin America are quickly on the rise through cross forces training and weapon sales. China’s 2019 National Defense Strategy states, “China is strengthening military exchanges with developing countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the South Pacific by carrying out personnel training, conducting exchanges between mid-and-junior level officers, and providing assistance in military development and defense capabilities.”<sup>28</sup> In 2015, China reached a new level in military agreements with Argentina after a four-day summit. In a report by the U.S. - China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China’s Military Agreements with Argentina: A Potential New Phase in China Latin America Defense Relations*, China and Argentina announced the exploration of agreements in the following areas:

1) Aircraft: A joint working group to assess the integration of Chinese-made fighter aircraft into the Argentine Air Force, such as the FC-1, which is an aircraft jointly made with Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

2) Naval vessels: The construction of “five 1,800-ton P-18N corvettes for the aging and underinvested Argentine Navy, with up to three of the ships reportedly to be coproduced in Argentina.”<sup>30</sup>

3) Amphibious armored personnel carriers (APC): “Coproduct 100 or more 8x8 VN1 APCs, developed by Chinese defense conglomerate China North Industries Corporation (Norinco).”<sup>31</sup>

4) Cross Military Exchange: Officer exchange programs between the two militaries and the construction of field hospitals.

5) Space: A tracking and control station in the southern region to locate their satellites and spacecraft when in the area, in addition to “forthcoming unmanned missions to the moon and Mars.”<sup>32</sup>

In sum, Argentina’s proposed agreement is emblematic of China’s growing military strategy with a combined projected value of \$569 million to \$1 billion, representing an astronomical increase from “China’s past official military exports to the country valued at \$2.6 million.”<sup>33</sup>

China’s aggressive approach in ambitious military agreements is representative of its determination in economic investment deals; an approach winning nineteen BRI agreements in only five years. Likewise, people-to-people connections through Chinese language and culture are drawing interest, resulting in an increasing number of Latin American students studying in China. These relatively rapid successes within the past five to fifteen years have caught the attention of the United States, who redoubled economic efforts with its neighbor through an economic initiative aimed at women and youth entrepreneurship; boosted public-private partnerships to increase student exchanges and collaborates with partner countries in the fight against drugs.

## UNITED STATES: ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

The United States' counteroffer to the BRI is a whole-of-government approach, including a newly formed agency, the DFC, that consolidated major economic instruments, such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). OPIC projects in Latin America are "valued at over \$7 billion, \$2.5 billion of which is in the infrastructure sector. Recent projects include development of an oil transshipment port at the Acu Port in Rio de Janeiro to which OPIC committed \$350 million." In Colombia, an 84-km corridor has secured a \$250 million commitment from OPIC for its design and construction along a southwestern highway. The U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, whose mission is to support U.S. companies, launched "Deal Teams" in several key Latin American posts to provide U.S. companies with information about upcoming opportunities, assist in their financing packages, and advocate on their behalf with local governments.<sup>34</sup>

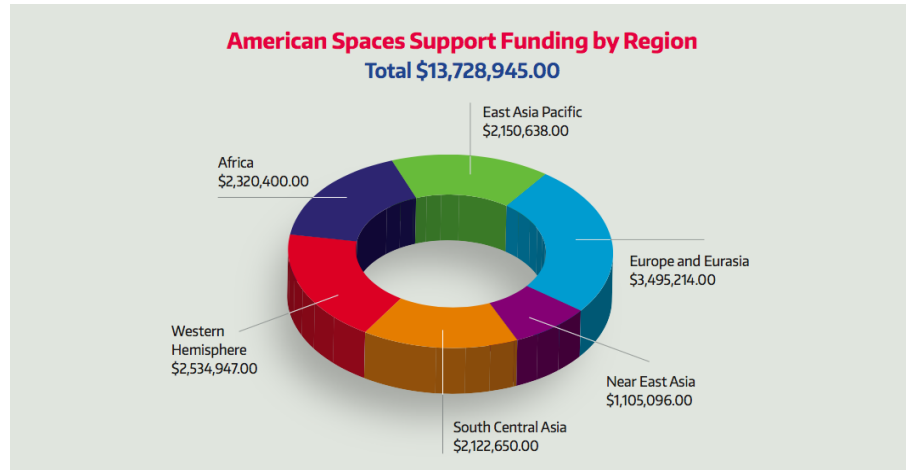
To double down on economic instruments and present a unified approach across the U.S. Government toward investment, Congress passed the BUILD Act in October 2018. The BUILD Act created a new U.S. development agency (DFC), making it the "most important piece of U.S. soft power legislation in more than a decade."<sup>35</sup> The BUILD Act emphasizes a priority on less-developed countries, minority and women-owned businesses, small businesses, and women's economic empowerment. Administered by the DFC is the newly launched "América Crece" Initiative, a "whole-of-government program that will foster private sector infrastructure investment in Latin America and the Caribbean."<sup>36</sup> From its launching in 2018, ten countries have joined América Crece, including El Salvador, Ecuador, Brazil, Honduras and Bolivia.<sup>37</sup> Administered by the DFC, and a component of the América Crece framework, is the 2X Women's Initiative, which serves as a model with more than \$3 billion in projects that are owned

by women. “In 2020, DFC committed to catalyzing an additional \$6 billion of private sector investment in global women's economic empowerment.”<sup>38</sup> The idea of empowering underrepresented groups through entrepreneurship and educational opportunities is also at the core of the United States’ soft power strategy.

#### UNITED STATES: SOFT POWER INFLUENCE

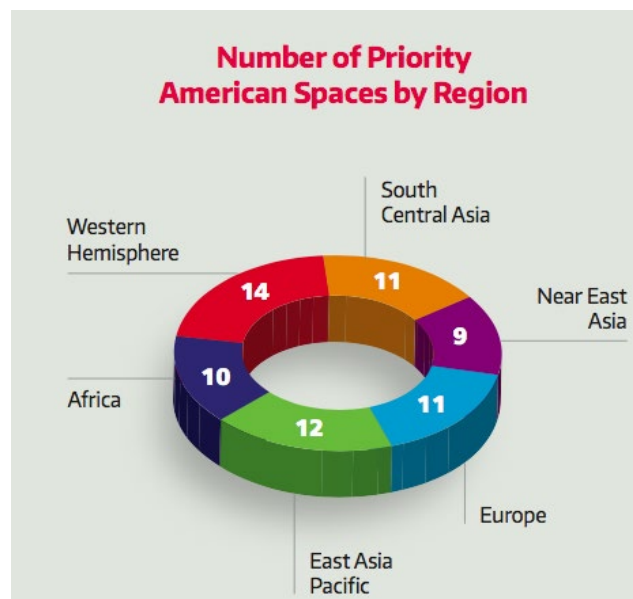
American Spaces, launched by the U.S. Department of State after World War I, connect foreign audiences with United States history, culture, and values through libraries, English language learning programs, and information for studying in the United States. The 650 American Spaces in 152 countries worldwide are run by U.S. embassies and consulates, in partnership with universities, non-government organizations, local government organizations, public libraries, local businesses, and more.<sup>39</sup>

American Spaces in Latin America are referred to as Binational Centers - autonomous organizations, such as the first established in Argentina in 1927; there are currently 111 Binational Centers throughout the region. Figures three and four illustrate the American Spaces’ latest report in 2017, which places Latin America with the second highest level of funding and first place in housing the highest number of “Priority American Spaces” in the world. Priority American Spaces are placed in the most strategic locations to further U.S. foreign policy goals.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 3: American Spaces Funding by Region in 2017**

Source: University of Southern California, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/office-american-spaces-2017-report>



**Figure 4: American Spaces Funding by Region in 2017**

Source: University of Southern California, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/office-american-spaces-2017-report>

Binational Centers are essential arms of information for students who wish to study in the United States. Their hard work in promoting the United States as a top destination is paying off according to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study that found of the 312,000 Latin American and Caribbean students who studied abroad in

2017, more than half (54%) chose to study in North America or Europe.<sup>41</sup> To add to this success, the U.S. Department of State created the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund as a public-private sector collaboration to “build bridges of connectivity, enhance institutional capacity, increase student exchanges, and strengthen regional education cooperation throughout the Americas.”<sup>42</sup> Thus far, the fund has resulted in 243 grants to 491 higher education institutions from 25 countries.

Building bridges within the region can’t rely on Binational Centers alone. The United States Agency for Global Media, whose mission is to “inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy” has a strong reach through the Voice of America (VOA) program.<sup>43</sup> VOA, established in 1961, broadcasts in Spanish throughout Latin America to 66.7 million people weekly through TV, radio, internet, and social media with United States news and information.<sup>44</sup> VOA reports on challenges in the region, including drug trafficking, which is a mutual issue of concern to the United States.

Finally, youth entrepreneurship is a fundamental concept in the United States soft power framework. For example, the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative, launched in 2015, has brought “763 Fellows, including 369 women, from 36 countries, hosted by 729 U.S. companies and organizations, in 26 cities, across 23 states.”<sup>45</sup> Providing youth with opportunities to build on their businesses, thereby creating jobs in their community, is critical, particularly in countries where youth resort to unlawful activities as a result of violence, corruption, and drug trafficking challenges.

#### UNITED STATES: SECURITY COOPERATION

The smuggling of drugs and people is an issue that hits close to home given the connecting geographic borders between the United States and Mexico, which serve as an entry

point for illicit activity. At the forefront of this mission in the DOS, is the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), charged with managing and funding international counternarcotics training and carried out by U.S. law enforcement organizations including the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the U.S. Coast Guard. According to the 2020 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, an annual report by the Department of State to Congress, the Western Hemisphere receives 61% of the bureau's total funding.<sup>46</sup> In Mexico, for example, assistance includes the donation of dogs to seize illicit drugs, resulting in the seizure of 1,550 kg of methamphetamine, 26 kg of fentanyl, and 8,850 illicit firearms, among other contraband, only within the first six months of 2019.<sup>47</sup>

Equally important are the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), responsible for providing contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) whose area of responsibility includes the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, and Mexico. Cooperation includes a February 2021 trip to Louisiana for the Brazilian Army, making it the first South American company-sized element to train at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk. U.S. Army Forces Command commander, Major General Daniel R. Walrath states "This Brazilian airborne company presence and participation in one of the Army's combat training centers represents the first time we've had a partner army from South America participate in one of these rotations."<sup>48</sup>

Security Cooperation between the United States and Latin America has never been more critical as drug trafficking and migration issues are exacerbated by a COVID-19 global

pandemic. One of the hardest hit countries in Latin America is Peru where COVID-19 was the leading cause of death in December 2020.<sup>49</sup>

### PERU CASE STUDY

This section presents an overview of China's economic, environmental, media, cultural, and COVID-19 engagement in Peru. As a country that is among a handful of China's key Latin American partners, China upgraded its bilateral relationship with Peru in 2013 "to the status of a 'comprehensive strategic partnership,' which is the highest level of relations between China and a Latin American country to date."<sup>50</sup> China is Peru's top foreign investor, particularly in the mining industry, and its partner to a free-trade agreement as of 2009.

Although Peru has decreased exports worldwide by 4.4%,<sup>51</sup> China is its number one receiving country, and it has increased its volume of imported goods from Chinese shipments by 5% since 2018.<sup>52</sup> In 2008, China sped ahead of the United States by becoming Peru's largest commercial partner and by 2018, its largest investor, particularly in the mining and oil sectors.<sup>53</sup> The BRI has also made its way into Peru's economy, including the most remote regions. For example, the "Bioceanic Corridor," an idea originally proposed by Bolivian President Morales to President Xi during his trip to China in 2013, and later rebranded as a BRI project, aimed at connecting the Atlantic coast of Brazil with Pacific coast ports to facilitate the connection of the continent with the Pacific.<sup>54</sup> As Chinese investment grows, so has resistance from local communities.

Las Bambas is the world's ninth-largest copper mine at 13,780 feet above sea level in the Peruvian Andes, with 8,000 employees. It is owned and operated by MMG, whose major shareholder is China Minmetals Corporation, a Chinese multinational state-owned enterprise.<sup>55</sup> MMG has been met with pushback from the local population claiming insufficient community

investment. In December 2020, residents protested the lack of benefits to the community from Las Bambas mining by blocking a road used for mining trucks to bring goods to Port.<sup>56</sup> In addition, China has also been accused of not following environmental laws in Peru's mining industry. For instance, several Chinese mines operated in Peru illegally and with botched environmental impact assessments, significantly damaging the environment and disproportionately affecting indigenous communities."<sup>57</sup> China's approach to environmental laws leans toward a noninterference strategy, giving companies no incentive to follow local environmental regulations.

Despite these image challenges, China is not taking to social media to shape the narrative despite the increasing number of Peruvians online, currently estimated at 24 million. A 2020 survey found that 94% of Peruvians surveyed stated Facebook as the preferred social media platform, followed by WhatsApp with 86% favorability.<sup>58</sup> A sweep of social media in Peru readily distinguishes a strong United States Embassy Lima reach, dramatically outdoing China's platforms. On Facebook, United States Embassy Lima has 385,286 followers, while it was not clear if China had a Facebook presence whatsoever. Two unofficial profiles claimed to represent the Chinese embassy with approximately 2,000 followers each. On Twitter, United States Embassy Lima engages with 56,800 followers while China has 7,437 followers. The United States' social media advantage provides a platform to hold China accountable for illegal practices. For example, on September 22, 2020, U.S. Embassy Lima posted tweets warning of a Chinese fishing fleet off the coast of Peru. The tweet generated hundreds of thousands of direct engagements.

Alert! A fleet of more than 300 Chinese flag ships with a history of changing ship names and disabling GPS tracking is in front of the #Perú . Overfishing can cause enormous ecological and economic damage. Peru cannot afford such a loss.



4:36 PM · 9/22/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

5,555 Retweets 680 Quote Tweets 7,175 Likes

Pollution of the Pacific Ocean is a problem that affects more than 41 countries. The Chinese-flagged fleet off the coast of #Perú and Ecuador appears to be dumping plastics that pollute the sea. Who will hold them accountable?



Global Fishing Watch | Sustainability through Transparency  
[globalfishingwatch.org](http://globalfishingwatch.org)

7:15 PM · 9/22/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

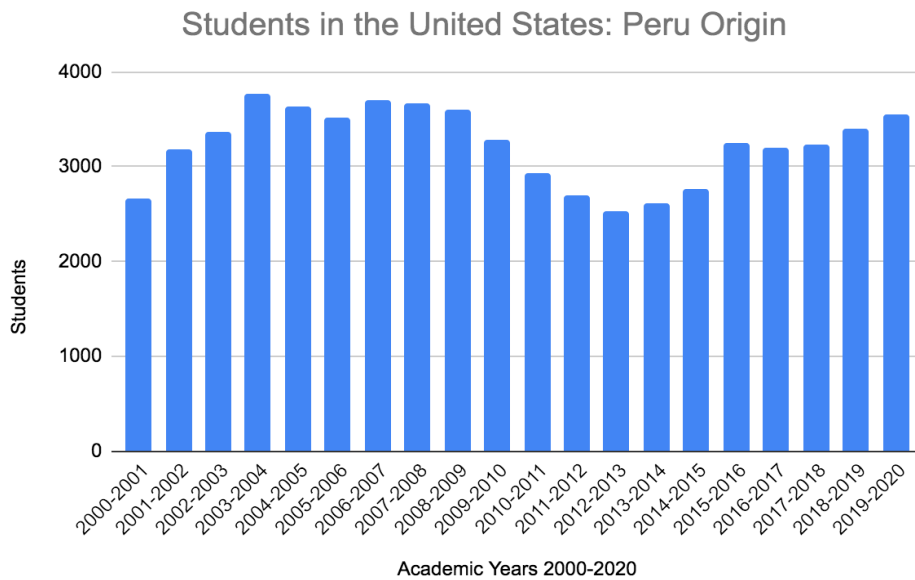
520 Retweets 52 Quote Tweets 779 Likes

**Figure 5: U.S. Embassy Lima Tweets warn of Chinese Fleets of the coast of Peru**  
Source: Twitter, U.S. Embassy Lima

However, social media doesn't tell the entire story. China's real reach is primarily through traditional media. In 2016, two memorandums were signed with local networks, including one between China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and TV Peru.<sup>59</sup> The focus is on news, documentaries, TV dramas, movies, and animation. The second cooperation agreement between the National Institute of Radio and Television of Peru (IRTP) and China Global Television Network outlines news exchange, co-production and non-newsworthy content swaps, technological cooperation, personnel training, and mutual visits. China's strategic traditional media partnerships boded well with twelve documentaries about China broadcasted for six consecutive days during the twenty-one nation Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Lima.<sup>60</sup>

A positive media narrative of China can help Beijing spark interest among Peruvian youth in their culture. Peru currently hosts four Confucius Institutes and is home to eight American Spaces. Due to a lack of transparency on data with the number of programs and

visitors at the Confucius Institutes, it's difficult to compare interest with U.S.-funded American Spaces in Peru. However, data indicates that the number of students choosing the United States as a preferred study abroad destination is growing from Peru with 3,547 students in academic year 2019/20 (4% increase). Data on students from Peru studying in China was not found.



**Figure 6: Students in the United States of Peru Origin**

Source: Institute of International Education, Open Doors Report 2020, <https://opendoorsdata.org/>

COVID-19: Pandemic Diplomacy

At a televised press conference, joined by his Prime Minister and other Cabinet members, Peruvian President, Francisco Sagasti announced that the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines from China's laboratory Sinopharm would arrive by the end of January 2021 to start a vaccination process free of charge through the public system.<sup>61</sup> A vaccine deal was eventually reached with Pfizer to supplement its supply as Peru's Intensive Care Units continue to struggle with keeping enough beds on hand and the first case of the highly transmissible variant was identified. As of March 19, 2021, Peru has an alarming 1.44M cases and 49,523 deaths.<sup>62</sup> In December 2020, COVID-19 was the leading cause of death in Peru.<sup>63</sup> In response to the rising numbers, Peru

locked down only a few weeks after the initial outbreak in March 2020. Some point to the widening of the pandemic due to the fact that “7 out of 10 Peruvian workers in the informal sector often ‘couldn't afford to isolate’ because they're dependent on daily earnings.”<sup>64</sup> Some blame the health system and its ineffectiveness in testing and contact tracing. To get a grip on testing for the virus, the GoP purchased 1.4 million rapid results tests from China Orient Gene Biotech but instead increased the spread due to a high false negative rate of the tests.<sup>65</sup>

The United States Agency for International Development reported providing over \$30.3 million in new resources to assist the GoP in its emergency response to COVID-19. Among the donations were 500 ventilators, two field hospitals for use in areas most affected by the virus, and Personal Protective Equipment with 40 passport readers from INL to the Peruvian National Police Aviation Bureau to assist in reopening borders safely with enhanced capabilities to detect fraudulent documents of incoming international travelers while also mitigating risks associated with COVID-19. The GoP purchased 501 ventilators from China, but local media reported the first shipment of 30 to arrive were the incorrect type and thus unusable.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Peru’s Health Minister resigned after an investigation concluded that 500 VIPs, including a former President were given “courtesy vaccines” of the Chinese vaccine Sinopharm in October 2020, well before the inoculation of the public.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, in the realm of security, Peru’s narcotrafficking challenges are paramount as “the second largest producer of cocaine and cultivator of coca in the world. Most of the cocaine produced in Peru is transported to South American countries for domestic consumption, or for onward shipment to Europe, the United States, East Asia, and Mexico.”<sup>68</sup> For this reason, the United States is working side by side with the GoP to crack down on drug trafficking. For example, “U.S.-supported Peruvian security forces exceeded the Peruvian interdiction goal of 50

MT in 2018, seizing 55.6 MT of narcotics, including 14.1 MT of cocaine base, 19.5 MT of cocaine hydrochloride, and 21.9 MT of marijuana.” China has also maintained a military relationship with Peru in the contracting of equipment, such as in 2014, Peru sought “40 Type-90B Multiple Rocket Launch Vehicles, of which 27 were ultimately delivered.”<sup>69</sup> In addition, like journalists, Peru’s armed forces has regularly sent personnel to China for institutional visits and training.<sup>70</sup>

### Analysis

How can we ascertain the impact of China’s efforts to engage Latin America and cultivate influence? This comprehensive overview of China’s strategic use of various governmental, political, educational, and private sector instruments represents singular measures of their reach and capabilities, but perhaps many indicators of rising influence. Chief indicators include increasing trade through the BRI, further reaching military agreements, a rising number of Confucius Institutes, an increasing number of Latin American students studying in China, and new opportunities to brand Beijing as a humanitarian partner in the fight against COVID-19.

China’s efforts have resulted in double-digit increases of favorability in Latin America according to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey. Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil are among those with double digit increases that feel China’s growing economy is favorable for their nation.

<sup>71</sup> Despite these gains, China’s charm offensive is thwarted by more than a century of trade, education, culture, and security ties with the United States. The United States’ longstanding relationship has earned its place as a preferred destination for study abroad among Latin American students and as one of the region’s top trading partners. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, U.S. goods exports to the Western Hemisphere in 2019 totaled \$710.8 billion, demonstrating an increase of sixty-one percent from 2009.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, China struggles to compete with the cultural and familial ties that bind the United States and Latin America. From Peru alone, there are an estimated 679,000 Hispanics of Peruvian origin in the United States. Overall, there are sixty million Hispanics, representing diverse origins and cultures.<sup>73</sup> To gain a deeper understanding of the region, China has launched university programs and research centers to focus on Latin America. For example, as of 2018, there are over 100 universities that offered Spanish as a major, equating to an eight times fold from 1999.<sup>74</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, China's use of economic, social, and security instruments to gain influence has yielded positive results as evidenced by bolting ahead of the United States as the top trade partner for Brazil, Chile, and Peru, but the United States remains Latin America's top trading partner overall. The expansion of the BRI will be met with skepticism from new partner nations if Beijing continues to be on the defensive of an image crisis with accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy." Meanwhile, the newly created DFC, with a high investment cap and enhanced product offering, is a major step forward for the United States in taking a whole-of-government approach in investment abroad. Through the BUILD Act, the DFC will now be able to deploy equity investments and up to \$60 billion to finance economic-development projects around the world—more than doubling the \$29-billion investment cap of its predecessor, OPIC. The DFC is a new policy instrument through which the United States can improve its financial positioning in Latin America where Chinese lending has gained profound traction.

In the domain of education and culture, Chinese cultural exchanges are increasing throughout the region as evidenced by the rise in Confucius Institutes for the past fifteen years, but data on program engagement is lacking to measure interest and effectiveness from youth. In

contrast, Latin America has 111 Binational Centers with thousands of programs and visitors each year.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the United States maintains its popularity with 54% of Latin American students choosing North America as its study abroad destination, though it can't be ignored that China's universities are welcoming an increasing number of students from the region. A major factor in the decision may be language. If Confucius Institutes continue to rise and convince Latin American students that Chinese, not English, is the language of commerce, those study abroad preferences may start to change.

Moreover, there are examples that China is taking an aggressive approach in security cooperation as evidenced by a plan with Argentina in 2015 that would have surpassed any agreement between China and a Latin American country to date. However, partners tend to look toward the United States when it comes to fighting the region's biggest security challenge of narco trafficking alongside various United States Government players, including DOD, DOS, ICE, CBP, FBI, DEA, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Finally, the case of Peru offers demonstrative examples of China's economic, social, and cultural reach. Its dependence on China as its number one trading partner has cleared the path for Beijing to influence across all domains. Unfortunately, projects have ignored the needs of surrounding communities leading to resident protests, such as in "Las Bambas" area. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the Peruvian economy and people hard requiring the GoP to quickly purchase ventilators from China to equip their depleting ICUs. When the ventilators arrived, they were found to be the wrong kind. In contrast, the United States donated 500 ventilators to assist the crisis, proving it's a much more reliable partner. Peru's COVID-19 example is a microcosm of China's pandemic diplomacy regionwide where it pounced on the

opportunity to show its humanitarian arm by donating hundreds of thousands of masks, dozens of ventilators, and thousands of testing kits regionwide.<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 7: China announces a one-billion dollar loan to Latin American and Caribbean countries to help secure a COVID-19 vaccine developed by China.**

*Source:* <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/15/americas/latam-china-us-covid-diplomacy-intl/index.html>

It is my hope that the comprehensive overview provided in this paper of China’s reach in Latin America, and that of its greatest competitor, the United States, will contribute to future analysis to quantify the reach of Beijing’s influence in the economic, cultural, and security realms of Latin America. The region is an emerging Great Power Competition battlefield for the superpowers, amplified by a newly elected President in the United States. U.S. President Biden served as President Obama’s main emissary to Latin America with a logged total of sixteen trips to the region. His expertise backed with a National Interim Security Strategic Guidance to double down on efforts in the region’s irregular migration, poverty, criminal violence, and corruption – “made exponentially worse by COVID-19” can help further cement the longstanding ties between the United States and its neighboring Western Hemisphere nations.<sup>77</sup>

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