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## CHINA'S DEFENSE COOPERATION WITH LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN: TRENDS AND LIMITATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* China started to develop military-to-military ties and defense-industrial cooperation with Latin America and Caribbean countries in the early 2000s as an element of its strategy of comprehensive cooperation with the region. Defense cooperation was mentioned in the Chinese documents and statements on the policy in the region from the early 2000s. However, China has always considered this defense cooperation to be just a secondary, subordinate element of its overall strategy in the region. *Methods.* The article is based on Chinese publications, statements, and documents concerning China's policies in defense cooperation with the region, as well as on Latin American and other Western publications on specific cooperation projects. The author compares the Chinese approach to defense cooperation with Latin America to similar Chinese cooperation policies in other regions, especially in Africa. *Analysis.* China views defense cooperation with Latin America as a subordinate element of its general strategy of economic and political presence in the region. Cultivating ties with the local military elites of Latin America is especially emphasized, and the exchange of military delegations started in the early 2000s. To boost defense cooperation, China is sometimes ready to provide significant military assistance to the region. China has established permanent mechanisms of defense dialogue with the regional countries in the form of regular forums and conferences. Other important venues of military cooperation include personnel training, joint exercises, and the region's visits by Chinese warships. China has managed to establish a presence on the arms market in Latin America in the 2000s but has failed to become a major weapons provider in the region. Currently, Chinese arms sales in Latin America are in decline. However, China has achieved major results in the development of dual-use technology cooperation with the LAC countries, especially in the fields of space and internal security. That may create preconditions for faster development of military and military technical cooperation between China and Latin America in the future. So far, the Chinese approach to defense cooperation in the region remains more cautious and gradual compared to cooperation with Africa. China is reluctant to challenge the US red lines here. That may change in the future as China-US relations continue to deteriorate. *Authors contributions.* Ekaterina Kosevich was responsible for researching and covering the development of political relations between China and Latin America. Vasily Kashin touched on cooperation in defense, the security industry, and dual-use technology.

**Key words:** China, Latin America, defense, cooperation, Arms Trade, dual-use technology.

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## КИТАЙСКОЕ ОБОРОННОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО С ЛАТИНСКОЙ АМЕРИКОЙ И КАРИБСКИМ БАССЕЙНОМ: ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ОГРАНИЧЕНИЯ<sup>1</sup>

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Китай приступил к развертыванию военного и военно-технического сотрудничества со странами Латинской Америки и Карибского бассейна (ЛАК) в начале 2000-х гг., в качестве составной части своей комплексной стратегии развития сотрудничества со странами региона. Сотрудничество в сфере обороны упоминалось в китайских документах и заявлениях о политике в регионе с ранних 2000-х. *Методы.* Статья основана на китайских публикациях, официальных заявлениях и документах по тематике военного сотрудничества со странами региона, а также на латиноамериканских и других западных публикациях, освещающих конкретные проекты сотрудничества. Автор сравнивает подходы КНР к сотрудничеству в сфере обороны с Латинской Америкой с политикой сотрудничества в данной области с другими регионами, особенно с Африкой. *Анализ.* Для Китая оборонное сотрудничество с Латинской Америкой является второстепенным элементом общей стратегии экономического и политического присутствия в регионе. Особое внимание уделяется развитию связей с военными элитами Латинской Америки и отмечается, что регулярные обмены военными делегациями начались в 2000-х годах. Для развития военного сотрудничества Китай иногда предоставляет значительные объемы военной помощи странам региона. Китай создал постоянно действующие механизмы диалога в военной сфере с латиноамериканскими государствами в виде регулярных форумов и конференций. Другими важными направлениями военного сотрудничества являются подготовка персонала, совместные учения и посещения стран региона китайскими военными кораблями. Китай присутствует на оружейном рынке Латинской Америки с 2000-х гг., но не стал ведущим поставщиком оружия. В настоящее время поставки китайского оружия в Латинскую Америку переживают спад. В то же время Китай добился крупных успехов в сотрудничестве с латиноамериканскими странами в сфере технологий двойного назначения, особенно связанных с космосом и внутренней безопасностью. Это может создать условия для быстрого развития военно-технического сотрудничества в будущем. Но в настоящее время китайский подход к оборонному сотрудничеству с Латинской Америкой остается сдержанным и поэтапным, в сравнении с аналогичной китайской политикой в Африке. Китай не стремится нарушать американские «красные линии» в регионе. Китайский подход может измениться в будущем, по мере ухудшения китайско-американских отношений. *Вклад авторов.* Екатерина Косевич отвечала за общий обзор развития отношений Китая и Латинской Америки. Василий Кашин – за описание собственно сотрудничества в сферах обороны, военно-технической области и в области технологий двойного назначения.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, Латинская Америка, оборона, сотрудничество, торговля оружием, технологии двойного назначения.

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**Introduction.** Since the early 2000s, China has been pursuing a strategy of comprehensive cooperation and partnership with the countries of the Latin America and Caribbean region (LAC), making it one of its important foreign policy priorities. The Chinese strategy, as described in the official Chinese publications, is divided into several blocks: political, economic, social, cultural, international collaboration, and, finally, peace, security, and judicial affairs [28].

Military exchanges are mentioned as just one element of cooperation in peace, security, and judicial affairs. While playing a relatively modest role in the general system of Chinese priorities in

the LAC region, Chinese military cooperation with the regional powers has long ago become an irritant in the relations of Beijing and some of its LAC partners with Washington.

Chinese activities in developing military ties with the region are sometimes getting exaggerated coverage, including speculations about potential Chinese plans to establish a permanent military presence in Latin America.

It is important to consider them within the context of the general Chinese regional strategy and, in comparison to Chinese military activities, in the other region of the world where China is trying to implement a similar strategy of comprehensive engagement, Africa.

The article examines the current trends in Chinese defense cooperation with the LAC countries and the ability of China to reach a level of military presence in the region similar to the one that can be observed in Africa now.

There are similarities between the Chinese strategies of cooperation with countries in Africa and LAC that contribute to such US fears. Chinese policies in Africa and LAC are often compared and some authors argue that Chinese policies in Africa may serve as an early predictor of what may happen with Chinese involvement in LAC in the future [3].

Africa has already become a location for the first Chinese permanent overseas military base in Djibouti; there is a permanent presence of Chinese peacekeepers in a number of African countries; and China is already a major player in the region's arms market. There is also a visible and growing presence of Chinese private security companies in Africa [18].

However, while the Chinese economic presence in the countries of LAC and Africa is already comparable in favor of LAC (China-LAC trade was \$450 bn in 2021 [16]; China-Africa trade stood at \$282 bn the same year [14]), the Chinese military presence in Latin America remains modest. While China tries to boost defense cooperation with the LAC countries, progress remains relatively slow.

Chinese defense presence in the region is considered in the literature to be primarily an element of China's comprehensive strategy, which is primarily driven by economic and, to a lesser extent, foreign policy considerations. As noted by Evan Ellis, China tries to use defense cooperation to support the wider Chinese geopolitical and geoeconomic goals; it is part of multidimensional engagement [27].

Chinese strategy in the region is sometimes declared and sometimes described by Chinese scholars as driven primarily by the growing interdependence of the Chinese and Latin American economies [30]. Daniel Lechin identifies the primary factors driving Chinese policies of engaging the LAC countries in defense cooperation: access to resources; interest in the local markets for mass-produced low- and medium-tech goods; growing Chinese investments in the region; the tech war with the US, which makes China look for additional opportunities to

cooperate with the LAC countries in high-tech, especially 5G; and intentions to counterbalance the US power [2, p. 6]. The key goals of these activities are to support Chinese economic interests and to increase Chinese bargaining power in its global agenda [2, p. 34].

**Methods.** The article is primarily based on open-source Chinese documents and academic literature describing various elements of the country's strategy in the region to identify the key priorities and strategic goals of China while pursuing defense and defense industrial ties with Latin American countries as well as with Africa, which is in some cases used for comparison.

The article examines both the Chinese policy in general and the specific projects concerning China's cooperation with the regional countries in fields such as military-to-military ties, defense industrial cooperation, and cooperation in dual-use technology.

The arms sales are primarily identified using the SIPRI arms transfers database, which, when incomplete, is supplemented by data from international defense industrial publications following the LAC developments, as well as regional media.

**Analysis. Military-to-military contacts.** China started the development of military-to-military ties with the region in 2003, when the first delegation, which included members of the Central Military Commission, visited nine LAC countries. Such exchanges, typically involving ministers of defense and chiefs of staff, became regular, especially after 2009, when they started to happen every 2–3 years. The scale of such activities is significant and involves Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Bolivia, Cuba, etc. [26].

There is a much greater number of lower-level delegations that are involved in mutual visits between China and LAC. According to US assessments, there have been more than 200 visits by Chinese military delegations to the region between 2000 and 2022 [45].

Among the issues negotiated during such visits were cooperation in military personnel training and visits to the region by PLA Navy ships. By the early 2010s, at least 18 LAC states had been sending their officers to study in Chinese military institutions belonging to various branches

of the Chinese military. There are long-term cooperation agreements between some of the LAC military colleges and the Chinese military universities. Notably, unlike arms trade, personnel training cooperation involved some LAC countries led by US-friendly regimes such as Chile and Colombia [26].

A large part of cooperation appears to involve special operations forces personnel with the exchange of 'best practices' with the Chinese. In this case, the Chinese may be interested in this cooperation even more than their Latin American partners due to the PLA's lack of combat experience for more than 30 years.

An interesting but so far unique example of the military expertise transfer from Latin America to China occurred in the late 2000s. As China was building its first aircraft carrier, Liaoning, the Chinese needed to get practical experience in operating such ships. Russia has apparently refused to cooperate since the Chinese did not want to buy Russian carrier-borne aircraft and other associated technology. In June 2009, China reportedly reached an agreement with Brazil to train a group of its officers on the Brazilian sole aircraft carrier San Paolo [31]. Such training has helped the Chinese better prepare for the operation of their own carrier fleet.

However, the number of Latin American military personnel training in China appears to be quite limited and incomparable to the scale of similar cooperation with the US and Europe. Even these limited contacts are seen with great suspicion by the US, which is concerned that such ties could be used to develop personal relationships between the Chinese and Latin American military leaders and to gather better intelligence on Latin America.

The visits by PLA Navy ships into the region started in 1997, before the general expansion of Chinese activities in LAC. In 2002, 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2015, the Chinese have made numerous visits to the regional countries, including Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela [22, pp. 1-16].

Since 2010, China has started to conduct small-scale military exercises with the Latin American militaries, mostly involving medical personnel, special operations personnel, and the navies. The exercises were dedicated mostly to disaster relief and counterterrorism. The first

exercise was a medical services exercise 'Peace Angel' with Peru, which was repeated in 2012, and that was followed by a 'Cooperation-2011' special operations forces exercise with Venezuela and a naval exercise with the Chilean Navy in 2013 [22, pp. 1-16].

China started to move forward to develop the institutional framework for defense cooperation with the establishment of the China-CELAC regular meetings of defense officials. The first such meeting was the China-Latin American Forum on Military Logistics, held in October 2015 in Beijing with the participation of 11 LAC states. Such forums later became regular. Simultaneously, China and a number of LAC countries have started to hold yearly China-Latin America High Level Defense Forums, which are typically attended by officers of the chief of general staff and deputy chief of general staff [29]. By 2022, the number of LAC participants had grown to 22 countries [45].

Chinese activity in the development of military ties to LAC countries is closely following the pattern developed in Africa, where China conducts regular exchanges of military delegations and runs an annual China-Africa Peace and Security Forum [24].

A major element of China's military ties with Africa that is not present in LAC is peacekeeping. In Africa, China is a major contributor of military personnel to UN peacekeeping operations [23]. Since 1989, more than 40,000 Chinese peacekeepers have served in African UN missions [4], providing the Chinese military with extensive experience operating on the continent. The lack of UN peacekeeping missions in LAC meant that the Chinese military had no chance to deploy here. However, China did participate in the multinational peacekeeping force in Haiti in 2004–2010 [32], although the personnel dispatched there were civilian officers of the Chinese public security police.

There is only one permanent Chinese facility in the LAC region that can be linked to the Chinese military with some degree of credibility, although indirectly. That is the Espacio Lejano deep space tracking station in Argentina, which was used by China in space exploration missions, for example, for Chan'e lunar probes. In China, such infrastructure, which supports the national space program, is typically operated by the

People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force Space Systems Bureau. Legally, however, the station has been built and maintained since 2012 by the Chinese Communication Construction Company and is operated by the civilian China National Space Administration. The US is leading a long-term campaign for the closure of the station, publishing lengthy reports about its potential military uses, including espionage, and about its links to the Chinese military [33].

***Chinese defense technology cooperation with the LAC countries.*** China has sought to increase its share in the LAC arms market since the early 2000s. In Africa, China has managed to become one of the leading arms exporters (second in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 2016–2020 period [7]). In LAC, China, while not playing an important role as an arms exporter, is trying to use more advanced forms of cooperation, including joint research and development in the field of dual-use technology (with Brazil), and is ready for defense technology transfers (with Argentina). As the bigger and more developed LAC countries are looking for greater industrial self-sufficiency and security self-reliance, the Chinese readiness to share defense technology may be a significant advantage in the future.

The dynamics of the Chinese arms sales are partly influenced by the regional politics of the LAC region, where acute interstate tensions and territorial conflicts are relatively rare. According to SIPRI, in the five-year period of 2017–2022, the number of South American countries decreased by 34% compared to the 2013–2017 period. There were two significant exceptions to this trend. One was Brazil, which increased its arms imports by 48%, and Chile, which increased the imports by 56%. Together, these two countries account for 68% of the arms imports on the South American continent [38].

However, both the Brazilian and Chilean arms markets have so far been closed for Chinese suppliers, which explains the decline of new Chinese arms export deals to the region in recent years. In fact, Chinese arms sales peaked in 2015 and have not returned to that level so far [17].

The long-term economic crisis in Venezuela, the biggest Chinese arms industry customer in the region, could be an important reason for such dynamics. To expand its presence on the regional arms market, China needs to become a major

weapons supplier to the leading regional economies of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, which the Chinese have so far failed to achieve. There are no credible reports, even on negotiations to sell Chinese weapons and defense technology to Chile and Brazil, and several high profile projects discussed with Argentina have mostly failed.

As of the beginning of 2023, China has delivered weapons to seven LAC countries, including Argentina, Mexico, the Bahamas, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. However, cooperation with the Bahamas, Mexico, and Argentina was represented by single deals, insignificant in scale. For example, the only deal with Mexico was the delivery of two batteries for 105-mm howitzers; the Bahamas got two armored vehicles as aid; and Argentina bought 4 APCs for its UN Peacekeepers in 2008. Four countries – Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador – procured Chinese weapons on a significant scale. These countries bought relatively expensive and sophisticated systems, including air search radars (Venezuela and Ecuador), light and medium transport aircraft (Venezuela and Peru), trainer and light attack aircraft (Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador), helicopters (Bolivia), and artillery systems (Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela). Venezuela is the biggest customer of the Chinese arms industry. The last known significant Chinese arms delivery to the region happened in 2018, when China donated 10 armored cars to Bolivia [37].

The decline in Chinese arms exports to the region since the mid-2010s is explained by the dynamics of the rearmament programs of the local militaries and the generally low level of military tensions in the region [21]. China understands that simple arms exports to the region have limited potential from both a political and commercial point of view. Chinese exporters try to use any opportunity to boost their presence on the LAC market but sometimes suffer setbacks because of US meddling. Such was the case with the 2009 contract for delivery of the Chinese MBT-2000 tanks to Peru. At that time, MBT-2000 tanks used Ukrainian-made diesel engines, and the US supposedly used its influence on Ukraine to undermine the deal. Ukraine refused to grant export licenses for the engines, which made the implementation of the contract impossible [1].

Chinese efforts on the regional arms market are aimed at establishing permanent and deep

cooperation with as many LAC countries as possible. To achieve that goal, China is ready to provide weapon systems for free as military assistance or to sell them at significant discounts. Chinese assistance to the regional militaries is usually provided by donations of non-lethal supplies, including military trucks and jeeps, uniforms, tents, engineering equipment, field hospitals, etc., to Bolivia, Guyana, Columbia, and Peru [15].

For example, in 2017, China and Peru signed two defense cooperation protocols according to which China was supposed to provide 16 buses, 16 minivans, 10 ambulances, 4 patrol boats, 1 ambulance, and an air control radar for the Peruvian military, with a total worth of \$18 million [12]. Argentines in 2018 got military, aid worth \$18 million, mostly military automobiles [11].

China did try to use defense technology transfers to expand its presence on the Argentinian market. In 2015, during Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's visit to China, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly produce 110 VN1 armored personnel carriers and 3 P18 corvettes for the Argentinian military [6]. The deal has failed to materialize, likely because of Argentinian budget constraints and economic instability. For the same reason, Argentina in December 2022 abandoned plans to buy Chinese-Pakistani FC-1 fighters [5]. Notably, if Argentina was politically and fiscally capable of implementing those plans, it would become the biggest partner of the Chinese defense industry in LAC instead of Venezuela.

***Chinese dual-use technology cooperation with the LAC countries.*** The situation in the dual-use technology cooperation between China and LAC is much more positive. While in Africa this cooperation has limited potential because of the weak technological and industrial bases of the local countries, in LAC it appears to be the real focus of China's efforts.

In this field, China can boast of a very successful and long-term satellite technology project with Brazil. The China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite Program, which started in the late 1980s, has so far resulted in the launch of six satellites between 1999 and 2019. CBERS-1 and CBERS-2, launched in 1999 and 2003, were equipped with wide-field and medium-resolution cameras as well as infrared cameras. In 2007, an

improved CBERS-2B satellite with an upgraded infrared camera was built and launched [9]. After that, China and Brazil started to work on improved second-generation satellites (CBERS-3, CBERS-4, and CBERS-4a), significantly heavier, more powerful, and with better sensors [10], which were launched between 2013 and 2019.

The program was described by Brazilians as a great success; the satellite images were provided for free to developing countries and public goods, which helped increase scientific production and solve some practical problems related to natural resource exploration and urban development, for example, dealing with landslides in some areas [40]. The program was co-financed by the governments of the two countries, each with a 50% share, and the Brazilian companies were initially responsible for 30% of satellite components and systems, which later increased to 50% [36]. The CBERS project was supposed to continue beyond the launch of the CBERS-4A satellite [39], although no new launch declarations have been made so far.

Technologically, the CBERS program was a two-way street. Brazilian participation has allowed China to overcome the bottlenecks of its domestic industrial base and contributed to the development of the Chinese Ziyuan series of earth observation satellites. All CBERS satellites were launched on orbit using the Chinese CZ-4B carrier rockets from the Chinese Taiyuan space launch center. Although a civilian dual-use technology project, the CBERS program has shown the ability of Brazil to jointly implement complex technological projects with China. The project has overcome many difficulties, including a failed launch in 2013. Chinese sources note that the project participants have also managed to successfully deal with the differences in cultures and business practices between the two countries [47]. This kind of successful cooperation experience, which lasted for more than 30 years, may play a positive role in the development of possible cooperation in defense technology if such a choice is made in the future by the two governments.

Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer had an agreement with Aircraft Industry Corporation of China on joint production of ERJ-145 passenger aircraft and Legacy 650 business jets in Harbin, but the program was not commercially successful and was stopped in 2016 [8].

Brazil is not the only country to cooperate with China in space, although Brazilian cooperation is the deepest. In 2008, Venezuela contracted the Chinese Great Wall Industries Corporation to design, build, and launch the Simon Bolivar (Venesat-1) telecommunications satellite for \$406 million. That was followed by a similar contract with Bolivia to build and launch the Tupac Katari satellite for \$300 million, of which \$295 million was financed by the China Development Bank loan [15]. In 2012, Venezuela procured two remote sensing satellites from China (VRSS-1, VRSS-2) that were launched by Chinese CZ-2 rockets [35].

With the second regional economy, Argentina, China has a partly successful experience of implementing the project of license production (apparently with low localization) of the Chinese Z-11 helicopters. Notably, the Z-11 themselves were unlicensed copies of the French AS350 Ecureuil helicopters. The first flight of the assembled helicopters in Argentina took place in 2012; 30 helicopters in total for both the Argentinian armed forces and the civilian agencies were supposed to be assembled [28]. It appears that no aircraft were delivered to the Argentinian military because of budget cuts, and the general number of helicopters produced was smaller than originally planned.

Perhaps the most sensitive dimension of the Chinese technological expansion in the region is the Chinese exports of urban and border surveillance technologies, as well as other security-related software and equipment, to the regional countries. That includes high-resolution cameras, equipment for fingerprinting, mobile network traffic monitoring, etc. China is prioritizing the exports of 'smart city' and 'safe city' technologies for both political and economic reasons, and LAC became the main area for such activities.

Mexico was the first country to start procuring Chinese surveillance technology when Mexico City Mayor Miguel Ebrard in 2007 started large-scale purchases of Chinese equipment for urban surveillance [20]. Ecuador was the first country in the region to build a nationwide surveillance system with the use of Chinese equipment and software. The project started in 2012, when the country received a \$250 billion Chinese loan. By 2018, it included a nationwide network of 4300 cameras with face recognition

functions controlled by 3000 employees from 16 regional centers. Additional capabilities, including drones and artificial intelligence (AI) enabled systems to process the video data, were added. China has also helped Ecuador build an AI research lab to further improve the capabilities of the system [25].

Ecuador was followed by Bolivia and Uruguay, which started to install large surveillance systems provided by Chinese companies such as Huawei, CEIEC, and the China National Electronic Service Company [19]. Other known examples of the procurement of Chinese surveillance technology include Venezuela, Panama, and Argentina. Growing dependence of the LAC police forces and security services on Chinese technology is causing significant concerns in the US, with American authors writing about China 'selling digital tyranny' to the region [13].

One possible explanation for the Chinese expansion, except for the economic and technical parameters of the Chinese systems, is that some regional countries may be procuring Chinese equipment precisely to keep their key security systems out of potential US intervention. At the same time, the Chinese government is actively encouraging the export of surveillance technology, including efforts at the top level. For example, the Joint Laboratory of Ecuador Public Security Emergency Command and Control Center, the AI center mentioned above, was opened jointly by Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Ecuadorean colleague Rafael Correa [46].

**Results. *The political significance of the Chinese military and defense industrial presence in the region.*** China maintains military cooperation with the LAC countries as a secondary channel for engaging the regional countries in a network of deep, comprehensive partnerships. They are primarily based on the growing degree of economic interdependence between the Chinese and LAC economies. Defense cooperation is seen by the Chinese as a way to establish closer ties with the regional security elites and facilitate the achievement of wider policy goals.

The most developed areas of military and defense industrial cooperation are the exchanges of military delegations and cooperation in the field of dual-use technology.

China has created effective mechanisms for regular communication with Latin American

military leaders, including holding regular forums and seminars that closely resemble the cooperation mechanisms already existing between China and Africa.

Dual-use technology cooperation, especially in the fields of space technology and surveillance technology, has led to a degree of dependence by a number of LAC countries on cooperation with China in these strategic sectors. This is the only area where China's defense and security cooperation with LAC is more developed than its cooperation with Africa.

China has failed so far to become a leading supplier of weapons to the LAC region. Chinese presence on the Latin American market is limited, and attempts to build defense industrial partnerships with the regional countries, especially with Argentina, have failed. That contrasts with China's role as one of the leading arms exporters, which can be observed in a number of other regions of the world.

While China has already established a permanent military presence in Eastern Africa (Djibouti) and is reportedly ready to build the first permanent base in Western Africa (Equatorial Guinea) [39], there are still no signs of similar attempts in the LAC region.

In general, the Chinese security role in the region remains limited, with few opportunities for expansion in the coming years. Even this very tiny cooperation has faced stiff opposition from the US. Their military officials regularly make statements about China 'aggressively expanding its sphere of influence in Latin America' [43], growing Chinese presence in the region [41], and even a new Sino-US 'frontline' in South America [42]. Even Chinese infrastructure investments are seen as potential security threats since China could 'militarize' the seaport facilities it invests in [44].

The future pattern of the military presence of China in the region may change depending on the major LAC countries interest in developing more diversified defense and defense industrial strategies, which may increase their interest in cooperation with non-Western countries.

The cooperation can be additionally supported by the growing interest of some major LAC countries in developing their own domestic defense industrial capabilities in order to reduce dependence on the US and Europe. The argument

for strategic partnership with China in the security and defense industrial fields, for example, is present in Brazil [34].

In this case, Chinese military aid to the regional countries, currently quite limited and mostly consisting of non-lethal supplies, might grow and include more militarily significant classes of defense equipment, including air defense, heavy UAVs, and modern long-range artillery. China may also expand the training programs for military personnel from the LAC countries.

Another factor that may contribute to faster growth of cooperation in the future may be the interest of the major LAC countries in asserting greater strategic autonomy from the US by developing their indigenous defense industrial capabilities.

China's cooperation with the LAC countries in some of the most sensitive areas of dual-use technology, including space and surveillance, suggests both the ability of the Chinese and their Latin American counterparts to implement complex joint technological projects and a significant level of mutual trust. China may be a preferred source for the defense technologies of a number of LAC countries, including Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela.

#### NOTE

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