

Comparative Analysis of U.S., Russian, and Chinese Military Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean

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While Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) were the focus of geopolitical concerns during the Cold War, posing for decades as a hotbed of proxy wars, their importance as a political priority for great powers declined when the Cold War ended. The fall of the USSR forced Russia to turn inward and focus on domestic political and economic consolidation, while the United States focused on its security interests in the Middle East and Asia. Nevertheless, the region has reemerged as a focal point in the great power competition unfolding on the international stage among the United States, Russia, and China. Amid this growing rivalry, LAC has again been designated a strategic priority in recent U.S. policy documents. The Trump administration's 2017 *National Security Strategy* emphasized the region's significance in the unfolding geopolitical competition.¹

Under these conditions, the three powers have made military cooperation with the LAC countries an essential aspect of their effort to assert their influence

in the region. The Biden administration's 2022 *National Security Strategy* stressed that the Western Hemisphere impacts the United States more than any other region, pushing the country to revive its regional partnerships and deepen military collaboration with its partners.²

The updated foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation, published in 2023, revealed Moscow's increased attention to the region. In contrast to the 2016 *Foreign Policy Concept*, it placed greater emphasis on the importance of LAC, with the main priority to support the region's governments through "the promotion and expansion of security, military and military-technical cooperation."³ The strategic significance of LAC was demonstrated by the official trip to the region by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov immediately following the adoption of the new *Foreign Policy Concept* to implement the strategic directions of Russia's foreign policy.⁴

China's 2016 policy paper on LAC also emphasizes military cooperation's central role in fostering relations



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with LAC. To that end, it highlights the necessity to expand military exchanges in training, education, peacekeeping, and between national military officials, and cooperation on security issues, military trade, and military technology.⁵ This direction complements China's military strategy, which underscores the value of sustaining friendly military connections with Latin America, Africa, and the Southern Pacific.⁶

U.S. Military Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean

Among the three nations, the United States has the most extensive military cooperation with LAC states. As demonstrated by former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, LAC is often referred to as the United States' "backyard," underscoring the influential role the United States plays in the region and the particular attention it pays to maintaining close ties with it.⁷ The significant U.S. military presence in the region has led to the "pentagonization" of LAC, reflecting the shift toward a more predominant role for the military in U.S. engagement with the region.⁸

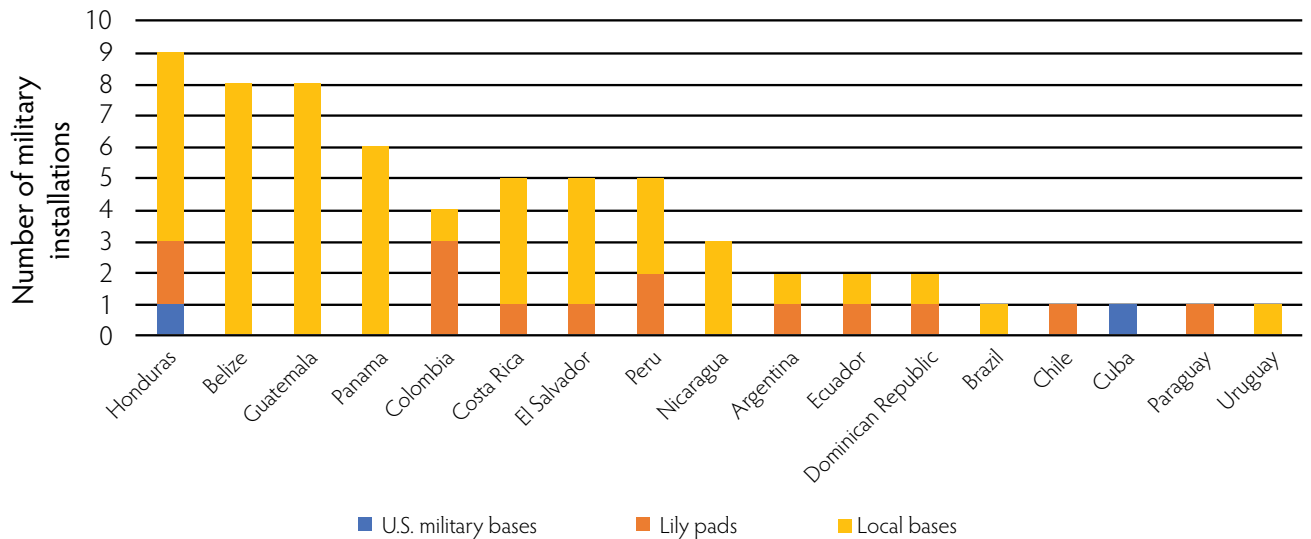
The military has become one of the leading agencies in the region for U.S. foreign policy.⁹ The United States is the largest provider of military aid to LAC. The United States provided over \$13.5 billion in military aid to the region between 2000 and 2009, and \$9.3

billion from 2010 to 2019.¹⁰ In 2023, the Department of Defense approved around \$115 million for security cooperation operations involving twenty-three countries in LAC.¹¹

Moreover, the United States has an extensive and exclusive military presence in the region. In addition to access to airports in Panama and Ecuador, the U.S. military has maintained a permanent or temporary presence in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Peru over the past ten years. Washington has made diplomatic efforts with Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia in an effort to secure the U.S. military's ongoing access to the region.¹² The United States has military access to airfields, radar sites, military training centers, military offices, and cooperative security locations in nine LAC nations in addition to two U.S. military bases, one at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and one at Soto Cano in Honduras.¹³

The United States' presence is reflected in seventy-six military bases in the region. These bases

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(Figure courtesy of the Mexican Center for International Relations)

Figure 1. U.S. Military Facility Distribution in Latin America and the Caribbean

are classified into three categories (see figure 1). The first category is main operating bases, that is, U.S. military bases located in friendly host countries where U.S. troops are permanently stationed. Next are cooperative security locations (or “lily pads”), which are small military installations that provide contingency access to a strategic location, storing military equipment for rapid projection. Finally, there are local bases, which are host-nation facilities to which U.S. operational troops have access and that function as military operations and training centers.¹⁴

Among these categories, American bases are distributed in seventeen countries, with a notable concentration in Central America (see figure 2). Honduras has nine military installations on its territory, while Guatemala and Belize host eight. Colombia and Peru are also critical strategic locations for the U.S. Army in South America, housing five military installations.

Furthermore, the United States maintains a central joint military exercise structure with the region. The United States has established a de facto strategic system of military exercises throughout LAC, with exercises conducted on a near-constant basis. Among them are UNITAS, the region’s oldest and largest maritime exercise, conducted annually by the U.S. Navy in collaboration with other Latin American navies; PANAMAX, aiming at ensuring the defense of the Panama Canal;

CENTAM Guardian, an annual exercise conducted to strengthen functional disaster response capabilities in the region; NAMSI (North American Maritime Security Initiative), which synchronizes operability between North American military forces; Fuerzas Comando (Command Forces), which trains the special forces of both American continents; and Tradewinds, an annual joint exercise focused on building the capacity of U.S. forces and nations in the Caribbean.¹⁵

Finally, the United States maintains a significant presence via the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). Founded in 1963 as a U.S. Department of Defense division, it is the primary vector of military collaboration between the United States and LAC. SOUTHCOM is responsible for all U.S. military actions in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. It has a presence in thirty-one countries and twelve dependencies and areas of special sovereignty in the region. SOUTHCOM explicitly states that its operations are concentrated on fighting drug trafficking, humanitarian efforts, regional collaboration, training and military education for the armed forces of the area, and military drills with allies in LAC.¹⁶

SOUTHCOM has been a pillar in the defense of U.S. interests in LAC. Accordingly, SOUTHCOM has opposed any actor that might challenge the United States’ extensive military cooperation with countries

in the region, resulting in vigorous resistance to the regional presence of China and Russia. In 2019, SOUTHCOM published its strategy for the region, in which it recognized Russia and China as the actors with whom it would compete most aggressively, arguing that their presence further destabilizes the region and threatens democratic government.¹⁷ To counter the growing presence of China and Russia in LAC, SOUTHCOM has pushed for greater interoperability and collaboration through security alliances with the region's militaries.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in recent years, SOUTHCOM has seen a noticeable decrease in the resources and forces needed to support its mission.¹⁹ Moreover, the United States has not committed as much military force in the region as in other parts of the world. Out of two hundred thousand troops stationed around the world, only two thousand American military personnel were permanently stationed in LAC in 2022.²⁰

In addition, the number of American military outposts and troops in LAC has declined. In 1999, the United States decommissioned its military bases in Panama and turned over control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanian government in accordance with preexisting agreements. In 2009, U.S. military presence in the region decreased after the Ecuadorian government chose not to extend the agreement to maintain a U.S. military installation in Manta. Finally, the American military installation in Brazil—U.S. Naval Support Detachment, São Paulo—was shut down in 2017 at the request of the Brazilian government.²¹

China's Military Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean

Chinese military engagement is neither the most significant aspect of its activities in LAC nor the core of



(Figure courtesy of the Mexican Center for International Relations)

Figure 2. U.S. Military Presence Visualization in Latin America and the Caribbean

its strategic concept for engagement there. China has mainly grounded its presence in LAC through economic ties.²² China has positioned itself as Latin America's second-largest trading partner after the United States, and its Belt and Road Initiative has expanded to include nineteen countries in the region.²³

China, however, has made efforts to extend its military cooperation in the region, steadily institutionalizing its military ties with regional countries. The October 2015 China-CELAC [Community of Latin American and Caribbean States] Forum, comprised of eleven Latin American states including Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela, represented a significant advancement in this endeavor.²⁴ China began convening regular conferences to discuss broader international security concerns, and the number of participants expanded dramatically. As Beijing pursues a new position in Latin America, the summits have served as one of the main platforms for boosting China's military ties with the region. In December 2022, China hosted a defense forum attended by twenty-four Latin American countries, a unique vector for Beijing to expand military cooperation with the region.²⁵ With commitments to advance defense cooperation and coordinate efforts with China, the defense forum gave Beijing a substantial platform to

increase its military and security cooperation with LAC.²⁶

China hopes to strengthen its military presence in LAC by supporting the countries in addressing regional insecurity. Thus, the 2019–2021 China-CELAC cooperation plan outlined China’s commitment to cooperate with LAC to combat crime and violence.²⁷ This infringes upon SOUTHCOM’s designated areas of operations in LAC, thereby offering a practical substitute to the U.S. military engagement in the region and portraying China as an important military partner for the region.

Moreover, China has been highly active in providing professional military education to the armed forces of the region as a way to enhance cooperation. As U.S. Congress placed increasing restrictions on the training the U.S. government could give Latin American nations over the past two decades, China began offering its own military training as an alternative.²⁸ China has been steadily establishing agreements with various LAC nations over professional military education.²⁹ Over the years, the College of Military Instruction for Foreigners at the People’s Liberation Army National Defense University, China’s top military education institution, has provided education to officers from nearly every Latin American and Caribbean country that has formally recognized the People’s Republic of China.³⁰

Several countries in the region have persisted in sending their military personnel to instruction in China, including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. By 2015, Beijing’s significant efforts to deepen military education ties with LAC led China to train more Latin American military officers than the United States. By 2020, there were more than five times as many LAC students enrolled in Chinese military colleges than there were in U.S. war colleges.³¹

Other noteworthy Chinese military presence in LAC includes port calls, military drills with partner nations, and important defense cooperation agreements. In the past two decades, Chinese military access to LAC countries has been seen with naval port visits in nine Latin American nations. This includes the three medical ship *Peace Ark* visits in 2011, 2015, and 2018–2019. Furthermore, in 2013, after sailing across the Pacific Ocean, two Chinese missile frigates and an escort ship docked in Chile and carried out a military exercise with the country. Later, these ships made port

calls in Argentina and Brazil. Furthermore, Chinese 20th Naval Task Force ships visited Cuba’s Havana Harbor in December 2015.³²

In the realm of military drills, China has conducted military exercises with Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. In July 2022, information surfaced on China’s plan for potential naval exercises in Venezuelan seas alongside Russia and Iran, which is yet to be confirmed.³³

Regarding defense cooperation agreements, China has signed several bilateral agreements with nations in LAC, including “comprehensive strategic partnerships” with Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, which is the highest agreement designation reserved for diplomatic allies.³⁴

Finally, China has provided high-tech equipment that is not officially classified as military cooperation but indirectly influences the security agenda. The increasing cooperation in these dual civilian-military use technologies is reflected in the provision of radars, surveillance systems, and, most importantly, space satellite supply. The China Great Wall Industry Corporation, the only private company approved by the Chinese government to supply satellite systems and conduct space technology cooperation, has produced units for LAC nations, including Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, and Venezuela.³⁵ These units came with the establishment of monitoring bases and space ground control, which China often shares with the host nations, providing Beijing with the ability to operate space observation facilities in the region.³⁶ Even though they are promoted for civilian purposes, the dozen satellite installations in LAC by China offer dual-use applications and enable the country to have an advanced defense presence in the Western Hemisphere.³⁷

Russian Military Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean

Russia has intensified its engagement in the region, as seen with the first international Parliamentary Conference on “Russia—Latin America,” which took place in Moscow from 29 September to 2 October 2023. Intending to make these meetings annual, Vladimir Putin emphasized the large potential for developing and expanding cooperation through new areas of joint activity as a result of direct engagement at the legislative level.³⁸

In addition to diplomatic ties, Russia has worked to strengthen military cooperation with the region. During the Army 2023 Forum, representatives of seventy-six nations attended, including several LAC countries.³⁹ Alongside the Forum, Bolivian and Venezuelan armed forces commanders convened in Moscow and met with the deputy Russian minister of defense to discuss the development of a military alliance. Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defense minister, urged Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, and Argentina to strengthen their military ties while thanking Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua for their support of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, without a unified LAC agenda, Moscow has prioritized bilateral connections above regional ones. To this day, Russia's military cooperation with LAC has revolved chiefly around Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba.⁴¹

Russia and Venezuela have maintained close ties in recent years. The technical-military partnership with Russia started by President Hugo Chávez was maintained and deepened under Nicolás Maduro. Under the auspices of the Bilateral Intergovernmental Commission between Venezuela and Russia, the two governments engaged in an extensive strategic partnership.⁴² While Russia has no military bases or official troops in Venezuela, Moscow has deployed military advisers and specialists for Russian military equipment maintenance.⁴³ Russian weaponry shipments to Venezuela have held a central position in the security cooperation between the country since the early 2000s as part of the Venezuelan government's efforts to modernize the country's military. Venezuela has stood as Russia's primary arms recipient in the region, having acquired a total of US\$20 billion of Russian weapons.⁴⁴ The Maduro government received Russian military hardware and military technological support. Along with the S-300 air defense systems, at least one hundred military trainers and technicians have been deployed to Venezuela.⁴⁵

In addition, Russia has had military access to Venezuela through port calls and naval visits, and to the airfields and military facility at Orchila Island in Venezuela.⁴⁶ Venezuela allowed Russia to fly nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers on its territory in 2008, 2013, and 2018.⁴⁷ Russia has conducted three military exercises with Venezuela since 2008, the last one

in 2018. The military cooperation between the two countries was also reflected by the signing of a pact to strengthen military cooperation in February 2022 by Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov and Venezuela.⁴⁸

The strong ties between Russia and Nicaragua date back to the Cold War period, when the USSR sponsored the socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front, which governed Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990. While their relations stagnated once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, they received a new impetus again in 2007 when the Sandinista National Liberation Front returned to power under President Daniel Ortega.⁴⁹ Since Ortega assumed the presidency in 2007, Russia has increased its armament sales to Nicaragua, providing 90 percent of the country's weapons.⁵⁰ Between 2014 and 2017, Russian military equipment shipped to Nicaragua amounted to \$121 million.⁵¹ Nicaragua receives training from the Russian military, notably the Nicaraguan naval personnel and members of the elite General Pedro Altamirano special forces unit.⁵² Additionally, Russia has provided significant training support to Nicaragua in counternarcotics operations, while the two countries have also jointly conducted these operations.⁵³

Like in Venezuela, the Russian navy has been permitted to conduct port calls in Nicaraguan territory. Both Latin American countries have also granted Russia access to airfields, military training facilities, and intelligence facilities.⁵⁴

Along with granting Russian warships the ability to use its ports, Nicaragua also permitted Russian Tu-160 bombers to land on its soil in 2013.⁵⁵ Since 2017, Russia has maintained 230 soldiers in Nicaragua in permanent rotation for sixty days.⁵⁶ In June 2022, Nicaragua expanded its November 2021 authorization for Russian forces to operate on its territory to include Russian troops, ships, aircraft, and armaments.⁵⁷ Finally, Nicaragua has indicated its intent to establish a Russian military base on its soil, which has yet to concretize.⁵⁸

Cuba and the USSR enjoyed important cooperative relations throughout the Cold War, but ties between the two countries were weakened after Russia's sudden withdrawal of financial support following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, significant segments of their military collaboration during the Cold War ended with the abandonment of the Juraguá nuclear power plant project in 2000 and the closure of the

Lourdes listening and intelligence center near Havana in 2002. Nevertheless, military cooperation between the two countries has resumed in recent years.⁵⁹

Russia has also deployed naval vessels in Cuba, as seen with the docking of the signals collection ship *Leonov* in Havana harbor in February 2014 and the *Admiral Gorshkov* docking in Havana in 2019.⁶⁰ In July 2023, the Russian navy ship *Perekop* docked in Cuba, marking the first visit in years of a Russian warship to Cuba.⁶¹

Since 2016, Russian-Cuban military agreements have focused significantly on the supply of Russian spare parts on which Cuba depends to equip the Cuban armed forces.⁶² In 2019, Russia lent Cuba \$38 million for the purchase of Russian weapons, and the two countries signed a memorandum of cooperation for consultations on mutual strategic priorities and for the fight against transnational crime and terrorism.⁶³

Moreover, as Russia and Cuba deepen their relationship, there has been a surge in bilateral initiatives and visits between senior officials. For the past year, several senior Russian officials visited Havana, including Lavrov and Secretary of the Russian Federation's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev.⁶⁴ In 2023, the defense ministers of both countries discussed developing a joint technical military cooperation.⁶⁵

Russia has gained access to crucial ports in the LAC to deploy its armed vessels in the region. In 2015, Shoigu made an official visit to Nicaragua and Venezuela centered around the access to ports and air bases to support Russian military operations in the region.⁶⁶ Subsequently, the Nicaraguan legislature approved a resolution allowing Russian warships to dock in Nicaraguan ports. In 2019, the *Admiral Gorshkov*, which entered service in 2018 and is one of Russia's most sophisticated ships, made port calls in Colombia, Panama, and Cuba.⁶⁷ The ship was accompanied by the sea tanker *Kama*, the logistics vessel *Elbrus*, and the rescue tug *Nikolai Chiker*.⁶⁸

Finally, a potential form of military cooperation between Russia and LAC involves Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) deployment in the region. Russia installed ground-based satellite monitoring stations in Brazil in 2013, Cuba in 2014, Nicaragua in 2015, and Argentina in 2020.⁶⁹ As with China, the technology's dual-use character indicates the potential military use of GLONASS ground satellite

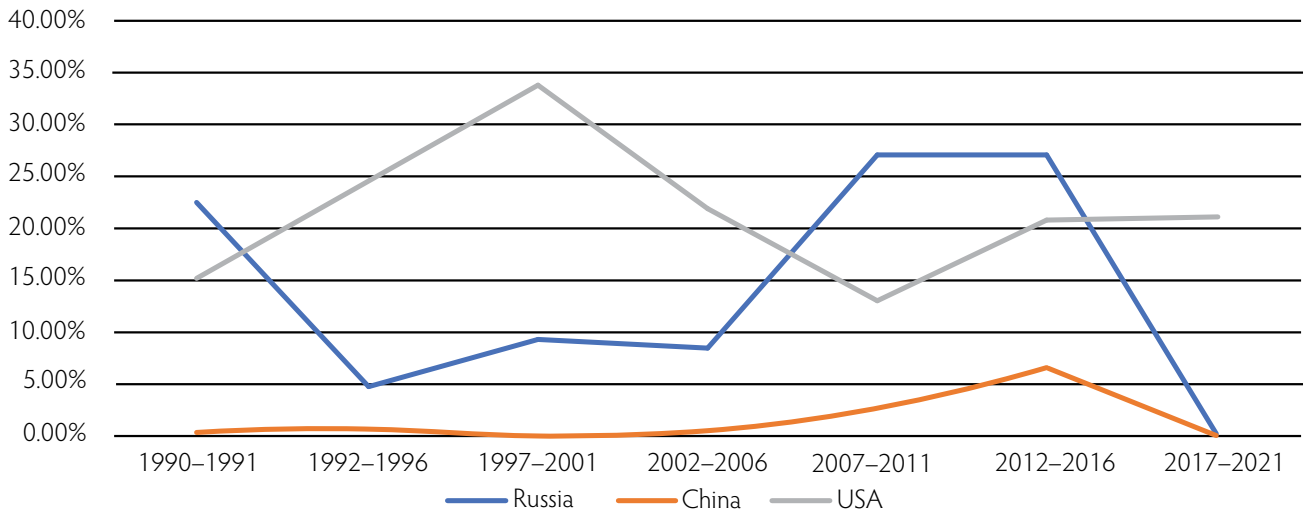
monitoring stations, as the Nicaraguan government has exploited the station outside Managua for fighting drug trafficking, among other internal threats.⁷⁰

Arms Sales with Latin America and the Caribbean

The United States, Russia, and China are the world's leading arms exporters, ranking first, second, and fourth, respectively.⁷¹ Arms sales are an effective way for these countries to build relationships, form partnerships, and project influence. The arms trade forges close links between the manufacturer and the consumer, linking them through the maintenance needs of weapons and expanding their cooperation through training and the logistics of newly acquired military technologies. Therefore, the three powers have made efforts to extend their military cooperation with LAC through the arms trade. LAC is a significant market for the sale of weapons as the necessity to develop military-technical capacities to combat the widespread criminal violence in the region that has pushed local governments to increase their military spending.⁷²

Since the mid-2000s, Russia's efforts to boost military sales to LAC brought major results. Russia's percentage of total arms purchases in the area rose from 8.47 percent in 2002–2006 to 27.03 percent in 2007–2011 and 27.08 percent in 2012–2016.⁷³ Consequently, the Russian military industry significantly increased its share in arms import by the region and overtook the United States as the leading supplier. The recipients of Russian armaments since 2007 have included Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela.⁷⁴

Russia's remarkable growth is explained mainly by the consequential arms imports from Venezuela, which have accounted for over 83 percent of all Russian weaponry sales in LAC since 2007.⁷⁵ Assuming the presidency in 2002, Hugo Chávez advanced plans to considerably enhance the Venezuelan military's capacity. A massive oil boom provided the Venezuelan government with extensive financial resources necessary to modernize its armed forces. However, the government's anti-American stance led to an arms embargo imposed by the United States and followed by European powers, which deprived Venezuela of its primary traditional supplies of military equipment. These three conditions provided Russia a unique opportunity



(Figure created using SIPRI data provided by Roman Ortiz, "Arms Transfers and Major Power Competition in Latin America," in *Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America* [2022])

Figure 3. Evolution of the Percentage of Market Share of the Main Arms Exporters to Latin America

to supply Venezuela with considerable alternative exports of arms.⁷⁶ Since 2007, Russia's weapons deliveries to Venezuela have totaled 3,492 million TIVs (Trend-Indicator Value), placing Venezuela as Russia's sixth largest buyer.⁷⁷

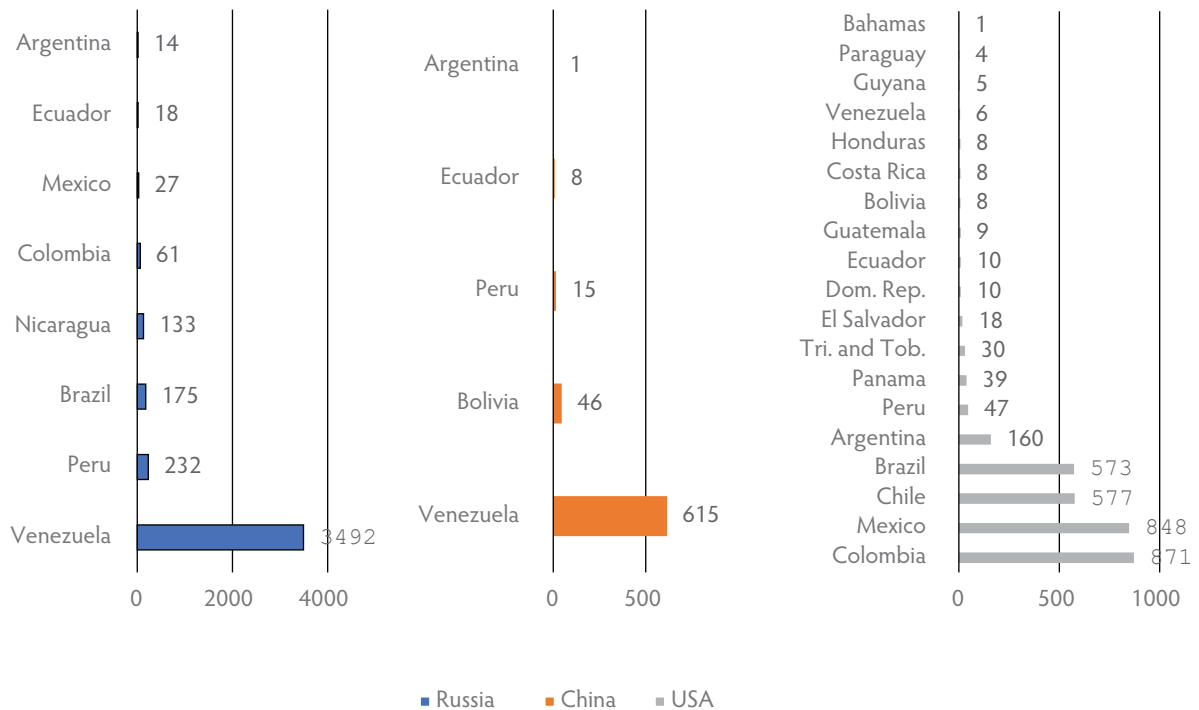
Despite not reaching the levels of Russia's exports, China also significantly increased its military exports to LAC between 2007 and 2016. Chinese share in LAC arms imports increased from 2.95 percent in 2007-2011 to 6.59 percent in 2012-2016.⁷⁸ Recipients of Chinese arms exports over the 2006-2016 period included Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela.⁷⁹ The large majority of China's military exports to the region were also directed to Venezuela, which has received almost 90 percent of China's weapons in the region since 2007.⁸⁰ However, with 615 million TIVs supplied by China to Venezuela since 2007, China's arms trade with Caracas is lower than that of Russia.⁸¹

However, the United States experienced a particular decline in its market share of arms exports to LAC, from 21.90 percent in 2002-2006 to 13.03 percent in 2007-2011.⁸² Even though the United States' market share increased in the 2012-2016 period to reach 20.80 percent, it remained second to Russia.⁸³ Nevertheless, the United States has a broader base of countries receiving American military exports, exporting arms to nineteen LAC countries since 2007.⁸⁴ Moreover, unlike China and

Russia, the United States has broad exports distributed among several countries in LAC, thereby preventing an overreliance on mainly one country for its arms trade. Overall, its main military export recipients in the region are Colombia (accounting for 25.21 percent of the total U.S. arms exports to LAC), Mexico (24.54 percent), Chile (16.70 percent), and Brazil (16.58 percent).⁸⁵

The last period of 2017-2021 saw a complete reversal of the preceding trend, with Russia and China's market shares falling abruptly. This development is explained by the sharp decline in Venezuela's weapons purchases. The Russian and Chinese arms deliveries to Caracas dropped drastically during the financial and economic crisis that began in Venezuela at the end of 2014. Russia's shipments to Venezuela fell by 88 percent in 2014 and stopped altogether since 2015.⁸⁶ Venezuela has also not received any Chinese weaponry supplies since 2017.⁸⁷ Consequently, as their arms exports to LAC were dependent primarily on the Venezuelan economy, Russia and China's market share in armament shipments to LAC declined sharply in 2017-2021, amounting to 0.03 percent and 0.22 percent, respectively.⁸⁸

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia and China have not made any new arms exports to the LAC since 2018 and 2019, respectively.⁸⁹ This can be partly explained by the substantial reduction in imports of military equipment



(Figure courtesy of the SIPRI Arms Transfer Database)

Figure 4. Arms Exports Recipients and Amounts since 2007 (in millions of TIVs)

by LAC countries, with the market experiencing a decline of 54.11 percent between 2012–2016 and 2017–2021.⁹⁰ The halt in the expansion of the region’s defense budgets, marked by the end of the commodities boom in 2014 and the additional pressure exerted after that on the resources of states by COVID-19, explain the absence of new arms orders from LAC during the 2017–2021 period.⁹¹

Furthermore, concerned about Russia’s growing influence in LAC and the security risks resulting from Russia’s strong foothold in the regional military equipment market, the United States in 2017 adopted the Act Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions (CAATSA).⁹² This law discouraged countries from expanding their defense ties with Moscow and contributing to the unchecked expansion of Russian sway by imposing restrictions on the acquisition or resale of Russian weapons.⁹³ Additionally, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the United States pushed for imposing harsher sanctions on countries acquiring Russian weapons to hinder the Russian military-industrial complex and Moscow’s

ability to fund its war against Ukraine while extending its leverage in other regions.⁹⁴ Consequently, these conditions allowed the United States to regain its position as the region’s leading arms supplier, at 21.10 percent in 2017–2021, and consolidate it after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁹⁵

Russia and China also demonstrate conflict dynamics in LAC, preventing them from consolidating their influence by joining efforts to strengthen their presence. The bilateral relations of Russia and China are ranked as the highest level of partnership within China’s hierarchy of diplomatic ties. This “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era” involves a shared commitment to cooperating on key international issues and coordinating their efforts to exert more significant influence on the international scene.⁹⁶ This special relationship has been branded as a “no-limits” friendship, striving together to uproot the current U.S.-led international rules-based order.⁹⁷ However, beyond the formal rhetoric, China and Russia have yet to materialize their bilateral cooperation in LAC. The reality of their relationship, at

odds with their narrative of close collaboration, is notably illustrated in Africa, where Moscow and Beijing have opposing engagement dynamics and overlapping objectives. In this strategic region, each of them also pursues a goal detrimental to the other, with China depending on the continent's stability and Russia thriving on instability to increase their influence.⁹⁸ Although further research is necessary to fully uncover the nature of Sino-Russian dynamics in LAC, the comparative analysis of their military cooperation with countries of the region reveals a situation comparable to that of Africa. Moscow and Beijing compete for influence in Latin America and the Caribbean and refrain from collaborating but are careful to avoid face-offs that could call into question their 'no-limits' partnership.

Conclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean have become focal points for major powers in the context of increased geopolitical competition on the international stage. The United States, China, and Russia have all recognized the importance of the LAC in their respective policy frameworks and have prioritized military cooperation as a key strategy to strengthen their positions in the region.

Regarding U.S. foreign policy, the military sector has emerged as the primary means of strengthening its regional presence. The United States maintains the most significant military footprint among the three powers in LAC. This is evident through the large number of military installations it controls or has access to, its predominant role as a provider of military aid, the extensive structure of its joint military exercises, and the importance of SOUTHCOM as a vector for deepening and strengthening its regional operations. As a result, the U.S. military has assumed a crucial role in U.S. engagement with LAC countries, contributing to maintaining its position in the region.

However, the United States is beginning to run out of steam to maintain its position, as evidenced by the reduction in the number of military installations at its disposal and the reduction in forces and resources allocated to SOUTHCOM for its operations. Finally, the United States sees a significant challenge in the involvement of its rivals in LAC, who are encroaching on its reserve space in their quest for increased geopolitical influence in the region. As a result, although Russia and China have a lesser presence on the continent, their

importance has increased to the point where they are considered threats by the United States.

China has expanded its engagement with LAC countries through a joint forum structure, broadening its focus beyond economic relations to include security concerns and creating defense conferences to strengthen ties with military leaders of the armed forces of the LAC. Furthermore, China has overtaken the United States as a provider of professional military education, assuming a dominant role in LAC in this area. It has challenged Washington's reserved areas of cooperation with the region by positioning itself as a key partner in the fight against regional insecurity. China has further developed its military ties with several LAC countries through naval port calls, military exercises, defense cooperation agreements, and the supply and operation of high-technology equipment for dual civil and military use in the region.

Russia has developed cooperative discussions with the region through joint conferences and international forums, following an approach similar to that of China. Russia has relied on these platforms to strengthen its political engagement with LAC countries while expanding its cooperation to the military sphere. However, Russia's military cooperation in LAC has focused on Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. Despite this, these three countries have given Russia a solid base in the region. Russia was granted the use of their naval ports, airfields, and military installations and provided them with military equipment, weapons, technological support, advisers, specialists, and training. In addition, Russia has strengthened its ties with each of them in recent years by signing new, renewed, or expanded military cooperation agreements. Finally, Russia gained access to LAC naval ports for military deployment of armed vessels in the region and provided dual-use satellite technologies to several countries.

Nonetheless, the enduring U.S. presence in the LAC region remains a stabilizing factor, limiting the opportunities for China and Russia to strengthen military cooperation with countries in the region. This is reflected in the arms trade. While China and Russia have significantly increased their arms exports to the region in recent decades, with the latter surpassing the United States as the region's largest arms supplier during this period, this progress has since been reversed, with arms exports ceasing altogether. This is mainly due to their

dependence on the Venezuelan market and economy, which reflects the contrast between their military presence and that of the United States. The United States has significant arms exports to the LAC region, covering a wide range of countries, while China and Russia concentrate their exports in a few markets. However, their failure to boost the arms trade in the region is also

hampered by U.S. apprehensions about the expansion of negative Russian and Chinese influence in LAC, as evidenced by the law imposing sanctions on countries acquiring Russian weapons. Despite their progress, Russia and China face obstacles in establishing strong and extensive military collaborations with countries in the United States' "backyard." ■

Notes

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