

IN UNCLE SAM'S BACKYARD: China's Military Influence in Latin America

Loro Horta

WHEN ANALYZING CHINA'S RELATIONS with Latin America, most observers tend to give marginal attention to the military and defense dimensions of the relationship and focus primarily on economic matters. A survey of official and academic publications on China's involvement with Latin America shows the minimal attention given to the military aspect of the phenomenon.¹

Many have pointed to China's limited arms sales to Latin America as a clear indicator of China's insignificant military position in the region. But weapons trade is not the only avenue available for establishing military influence abroad. Military and defense education, official visits by military officers and defense officials at various levels, participation in joint exercises, UN missions, air shows, and the provision of both non-military and military services are ways the Chinese are increasingly building a presence in Latin America. China's defense ties with Latin America have until recently been sporadic, involving little more than a few widely spaced official visits and even fewer hardware sales. However, since 2000, China has engaged in a patient, comprehensive diplomacy strategy toward Latin America. The PLA's new charm offensive is slowly but steadily winning a foothold. Initiatives beyond arms sales are incrementally allowing the PLA to create a foundation for long-term military cooperation in the not so distant future.

There are significant political, economic, and military dimensions to most weapons trade. By that, I mean that major arms sales tend to follow or run in parallel with close and favorable political and economic relations. For instance, major recipients of U.S. arms, such as Israel, are allies of Washington that enjoy a close, privileged relationship. The same applies to NATO members and U.S. allies in Asia and the Middle East. Arms sales take place in a larger political and diplomatic setting. A direct link exists between major arms transferences and the nature of political and economic relations.

Using this line of reasoning, we can conclude that China's arms sales to Latin America are likely to increase as China's political and economic relations with Latin America progress. Beijing's rising economic and political influence in Latin America may pave the way for major Chinese arms sales and a further expansion of its military influence. China's sophisticated new defense diplomacy is a major force driving this process.

China's Military Diplomacy

Defense-related and military education is an increasingly important, albeit unnoticed, instrument in Chinese defense policy. Training of Latin American

Loro Horta is a Visiting Scholar at the Center for International Security Studies (CSIS) at Sydney University in Australia. He is also a graduate of the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army and the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii.

military officers in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) academies has certainly been on the rise. Not so long ago, few officers from Latin America attended Chinese military academies. However, in the past several years, over 100 officers representing the three services of 12 Latin American countries graduated from PLA academies.

China trains officers at all levels of command and in all services. For instance, at the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Command Staff College, junior and senior officers from Latin America attend different levels of education in the same year, allowing the Chinese military to become acquainted with officers from different generations and from all services.² Most significant perhaps is China's training of the upper echelons of Latin America's military at Beijing's elite national defense university, PLANDU. Each year Spanish-speaking senior officers from all services attend a four-and-one-half month-long course on grand strategy. By inviting these officers, the PLA is ensuring that attendees are those who will be in positions of power, which will allow closer relations with China and enhance influence and prestige with the Latin American military.³

Surprisingly, officers from countries hostile to the United States such as Cuba or Venezuela no longer frequent these courses, while countries with traditionally close relations with the United States such as Colombia, Chile, and Argentina do. In addition to the academic component, these courses include a strong element of defense diplomacy and personal networking. Course participants visit historic places and monuments such as the Great Wall and engage in scenic and picturesque activities such as cruises along the Yangtze and Pearl Rivers. In the words of a Uruguayan air force colonel, these visits aim at "socializing the barbarians into the splendors of Chinese civilization."⁴

Other visits and field trips showcase China's new wealth and technological prowess. Visits to the country's major armaments companies such as Northern Industries, China State Shipbuilding, China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, and other military-related firms figure preeminently in the program. Other visits include the Baosteel aluminum plant in Shanghai, car assembly plants, and aviation research centers. Visits to some of the country's more modern and innovative buildings are an opportunity for foreign officers to marvel

at China's architectural and engineering achievements. (During these visits, the hosts usually do not mention the names of the Western architects and companies who actually did most of the work.)

The PLA has also sent its own officers to courses held in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico. However, the number of Chinese officers heading for courses in Latin America has been smaller than the number of South American personnel attending Chinese military academies. In 2007, some 40 officers from the Americas studied in China, while only 6 PLA officers attended courses in Latin America, attending mostly short language courses and internships at local academies. Lack of fluency in the language seems to be the major reason that so few PLA officers attend Latin American military establishments. Most PLA officers proficient in Spanish and Portuguese are young, recently graduated lieutenants too junior to attend higher command courses. In addition, the PRC sees itself as the senior partner in these exchanges and believes Latin America's militaries have far more to learn from China's military traditions than the PLA has to learn from what they see as undisciplined, party-prone Latin American officers.

In addition to inviting Latin American officers to study at PLA schools, the Chinese military offers them scholarships to attend China's most prestigious civilian universities. China has also funded the education of some military officers and defense officials at Beijing National University and the Shanghai Institute of International Relations. In 2007, officers from Ecuador, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Venezuela attended Chinese language and culture courses at civilian universities.

Official visits. Official visits and other exchanges have become an important aspect of Sino-Latin

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American defense relations as Beijing has intensified its defense diplomacy with the hemisphere. Nearly all chiefs of defense forces and ministers of defense from Latin America have visited China. In August 2006, Bolivia's minister of defense visited the People's Republic of China (PRC) for a week, and the commanders of the Uruguayan army and navy visited Beijing a month later. In April 2007, the chief of the Bolivian defense force visited Beijing; the Chilean, Peruvian, and Ecuadorian chiefs of defense forces followed suit in May and June. In August 2007, the Argentine minister of defense and the chief of the Brazilian army visited the PRC as well.

Ship calls in China by South American navies are becoming far more frequent. Peruvian, Mexican, Chilean, and Colombian vessels visited mainland ports in the past several years. The only visit by PLAN ships to Latin America took place in 2002 when the Chinese navy conducted its first circumnavigation of the globe. On that occasion, a missile destroyer and a supply ship visited Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil.

The Chinese navy is increasingly able to operate far from its regional waters, at least for purposes of limited naval exercises. It demonstrated this in September 2007 by participating in joint naval exercises with the British Royal Navy in the North Atlantic and with the Spanish and French navies in the Mediterranean.⁵ However, to preclude tensions with the U.S., the Chinese navy avoids showing a regular presence at Latin American ports.

Between January 2005 and June 2006, Chinese officials visiting Latin America included the Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff, the Commander of the Lanzhou Military Area Command, the Commander of the PLA Air Force, the Political Commissar of the PLA Air Force, the Political Commis-

sar of General Logistics, the Political Commissar of General Armaments, and the Deputy Chief of the General Political Department.⁶ In addition, logistics delegations, regional area commands, heads of departments, and members of the PLANDU academic staff paid informal and less senior-level visits to their South American counterparts.

Cultural events. The PLA also increased its participation in cultural events in Latin America as a part of China's defense diplomacy package. Such activities included visits by PLA cultural and entertainment teams, such as the PLA band's visit to Grenada for that country's 32d anniversary independence celebrations. PLA bands and acrobatic troupes have visited Peru, Ecuador, Guyana, Venezuela, and Bolivia, while photo and movie exhibits have exalted PLA contributions and exhibited the PLA's fighting prowess in countries throughout Latin America.

PLA units participated in military demonstrations and shows in Latin America as well. Chinese fighter jets and transports were at air shows in Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil, and Chinese defense companies attended arms exhibitions and defense-



AP Photo: Andy Wong
A billboard promoting China's People's Liberation Army on display in Beijing, 4 March 2008. China said that spending on its military this year will jump by 17.6 percent compared with 2007, the latest in a string of double-digit defense increases.

related conferences and seminars throughout Latin America. Beijing military attachés and PLA support personnel have travelled to the 14 Latin American countries that abide by Beijing's one-China policy. The military attachés observe local military exercises and participate in seminars, cultural events, and other activities organized by the host countries' defense academies.

Another way in which the Chinese military has been assisting local militaries is by deploying specialized personnel such as doctors, engineers, telecommunications experts, and other highly trained personnel to Latin America. The absence of such specialized personnel in some of the least developed countries in Latin America makes them a valuable and expensive commodity. China has deployed medical teams to military hospitals in Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, and PLA engineers to Ecuador and Bolivia.⁷

Gifts and friendship prices. The fact that Chinese arms sales to the southern hemisphere have been marginal has led many observers to underestimate the role of Chinese arms in fostering closer defense ties. For instance, while Chinese arms sales to Bolivia have been negligible, donations of war materiel have not. Since President Evo Morales came to power in 2006, China has given the Bolivian armed forces significant quantities of military equipment and non-lethal equipment such as transport trucks, jeeps, and engineering and logistical equipment. On 11 September 2007, in a ceremony marked by great fanfare, senior Bolivian officials including President Evo Morales, the minister of defense, and the chief of the Bolivian defense force accepted delivery of 43 Chinese-made military transport vehicles for the Bolivian armed forces. A military cooperation agreement signed by the Bolivian minister of defense during a visit to the PRC in August 2006 provided the Bolivian military with \$1.2 million in assistance in 2007 and \$2 million in 2008.⁸ Moreover, China has supplied the Bolivian military with combat equipment such as medium artillery, mortars, heavy machine guns, and assault rifles, and has donated river patrol gunboats armed with light caliber cannons and machine guns.⁹ China may replace 38 shoulder-fired HN 5 antiaircraft missiles that a CIA operation took out of the country in 2005. The HN 5s were a concern for the U.S. military because this weapon system found

its way to the narco-guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party. They used the HN 5s against American-made helicopters operated by the Colombian army. The Chinese missiles were effective in evading the defensive countermeasures aboard the American-made choppers. Thus, the CIA operation removed them from Bolivia after Evo Morales' anti-U.S. government took power.¹⁰

China has supplied other Latin American countries with "non-lethal" military items. The armed forces of Guyana and other Caribbean nations have received uniforms, tents, field kitchens, vehicles, and engineering equipment. Police and paramilitary groups have received side arms, anti-riot equipment, communications equipment, and vehicles. China helped the Guyanese defense force construct sport and recreation facilities for defense force personnel and donated music equipment and educational materials.¹¹

PLA-linked companies. Numerous PLA-linked companies and businesses operate throughout the world and are a rarely noticed component of China's defense diplomacy. Most of these companies are under the General Logistics Department. China Northern Industries has major investments in Latin America in areas such as road-building; bridge-laying and maintenance; construction of electric power plants; shipping ventures; and automobile plants in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. China South Industries Group has invested in car assembly lines in Argentina and motorcycle and bus-manufacturing plants in Colombia. Chinese logistics companies have profited from supplying the private sector with uniforms, boots, gloves, helmets, trailers, construction materials, refrigerators, and air conditioners.

China's major naval firms have also obtained lucrative contracts. In May 2006, Venezuela signed a \$1.3 billion contract with China's two most important shipbuilding companies to build 18 oil tankers to bolster exports.¹² Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing sold 10 Y-12s for civilian use to Argentina, Cuba, Paraguay, and Bolivia, and China's fast-growing helicopter industry caters to civilian interests in Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the Caribbean.

Defense diplomacy and arms sales. Because of China's patient, persistent defense diplomacy, the PLA has made steady progress in expanding its links

within Latin America. While the Chinese military presence in the Americas has been marginal when compared with that of the United States, China is rapidly emerging as a military player in a region where its presence was once non-existent. The Chinese military has carefully nurtured a sophisticated, multidimensional defense diplomacy strategy to create a political environment for more ambitious initiatives in the medium- to long-term future. As argued above, major arms sales tend to take place in the context of a larger political and economic relationship and not in a vacuum. They serve as much as an opportunity for profit as an opportunity to cement political and diplomatic alliances.

Arms Sales

China's blossoming has made it a significant economic player in Latin America. Its trade to the region reached \$50 billion in 2006, and its newfound economic power in the Americas increased its political power accordingly. China is conducting its defense relations with Latin America in a political and economic setting that may pave the way for major arms sales. While it is difficult to acquire information concerning Chinese arms sales to countries with regimes the West deems hostile,

open-source information and other analytical avenues indicate that Chinese arms sales to Latin America are slowly but steadily on the rise.

In 2005, China signed a contract with Venezuela to supply three JVL-1-type radars, a complete command and control system, spare parts, training, technical assistance, and a communications satellite leasehold for the price of \$150 million.¹³ While this was a major arms deal by the standards of past Chinese sales to Latin America, making a profit was not Beijing's main objective. Indeed, even for low-cost Chinese systems, the deal was a bargain; buying such a system and its related assets in the West would have cost at least two to three times as much. While making little if any profit, the sale of weapons at "friendship prices" allowed China to penetrate a new market and build good will among Latin Americas militaries.

This strategy seems to be slowly paying dividends. Venezuela purchased 24 aircraft from China's state-owned Nanchang Aircraft Manufacturing Company and 10 more from Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly*, this included 24 K-8 basic trainers and ground attack aircraft and 10 Y-12 twin-turboprop, short take-off and landing, general-purpose trans-

ports.¹⁴ Chinese companies have sold bridges, pontoons, earth movers, and field kitchens to the Venezuelan military, and Hugo Chavez's government has shown considerable interest in Chinese missiles and electronic warfare equipment. However, Beijing seems reluctant to transfer certain systems to the unpredictable Chavez because of the possible negative consequences to Sino-American relations.

Chinese military-aviation companies have made inroads into Peru, Bolivia, and Uruguay. In October 2007, the Bolivian air force took delivery of two Chinese-made M60 aircraft after receiving a \$35 million line of credit from Beijing.¹⁵ By offering such generous payment terms, China's defense industries hope to



AFP, Frederic J. Brown

Visiting Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez walking beside Chinese President Hu Jintao during a review of the honour guard welcoming ceremony, 24 August 2006, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

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slowly accustom local militaries to their products and create a loyal Latin American clientele. This strategy seems to be working in Bolivia. The Bolivian air force is considering replacing its aging A7 aircraft with the J-7 fighter jet, a Chinese equivalent of the Russian MIG-21.

Financially strapped Bolivia has watched its neighbors acquire modern fighters from the West. Chile has the F-16; Argentina, the Mirage 2000; and Peru has advanced Russian fighters like the MIG-29 and Su-30. It is a matter of some urgency for the Bolivian government to acquire affordable, modern fighter jets; some Bolivian air force officers claim that the air force is 30 years behind those of its neighbors in modern equipment.¹⁶ China's lines of credit and flexible terms of payment have made the J-7 an attractive purchase.

The Uruguayan air force may replace its aging A-7 fleet with J-7s as well by acquiring them on credit or through China's forgiveness of Uruguay's foreign debt.¹⁷ Ecuador has purchased Chinese air defense artillery, heavy machine guns, and military bridges, and Guyana bought a single Y-12 for its tiny air force and patrol boats to enhance its modest naval assets.

To “help the country defend itself,” Colombia may buy the PRC armored personnel carriers (APCs), artillery, rocket-propelled grenades, 81-millimeter mortars, assault rifles, logistics equipment, and side arms and submachine guns for the Colombian police and paramilitary.¹⁸

Argentina may buy helicopters and transport planes, radars, heavy artillery, and antitank missiles. In August 2007, Latin American defense sources disclosed that Argentina was testing the Z-11, a Chinese version of Ecureuil AS 350 B2 built by Eurocopter. Argentina plans to spend \$80 million to acquire Z-11s for army aviation. However, a Eurocopter representative challenged the sale's legality, telling the Argentine press, “[China has] no license to pro-

duce this helicopter. Their helicopter is a bad copy of our Ecureuil; they bought a second-hand model and copied it.”¹⁹ The commander of the Argentine army replied, “The incorporation of this modern machine in to our force will significantly increase the operational capacity of the army's aviation.”²⁰

A significant 2007 military cooperation agreement may lead to Argentina buying certain Chinese systems and producing them under license. Apart from the Z-11, the PRC will also transfer mobile radar technology, anti-tank missile technology and air defense systems to Argentina.²¹ Other licensed production agreements include non-lethal equipment such as transport trucks, jeeps, and engineering vehicles. In addition to its affordable prices and generous terms of payment, China's willingness to transfer sensitive technology to local military industries makes its products an irresistible option. The Argentine government described the agreement with Beijing as “crucial and strategic for Argentina's future.”²²

Technology transfers are likely to become a major factor in deciding future acquisitions by technologically advanced Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, which have been developing military industries for 20 years. Chile has shown interest in advanced communications and transport aviation and has purchased red arrow antitank missiles and Z9 utility helicopters. However, China faces strong competition from Western and Russian companies who have supplied the Chilean air force for decades and have strong links with the local authorities.²³ The Z9's acquisition is certain to cause controversy because the aircraft is a licensed copy of the French Eurocopter, AS 365N Dauphin II.²⁴

During President Alberto Fujimori's administration in the 1990s, Peru acquired Chinese weapons by secret presidential decrees outside the control of the Peruvian parliament. Peru purchased weapons with Chinese private firms and individuals acting as intermediaries to avoid any incriminatory government involvement. A Peruvian senate inquiry discovered that six Chinese companies sold about \$148 million worth of military equipment to the Fujimori regime between 1990 and 2000.²⁵ The sales included six Y-12 transport aircraft, artillery, transport equipment, ammunition, and spare parts.²⁶

The Fujimori regime's collapse in 2003 curtailed Chinese military sales, but China continued to

supply spare parts to Peru and service Chinese-made equipment. China remains an important supplier of non-lethal items such as uniforms and logistics equipment, and PLA-linked companies are active in various sectors of the Peruvian economy. However, for the time being, it remains unlikely that Chinese arms sales to the country will experience another 1990s-style bonanza.

In June 2001, the *Washington Times* reported that three Chinese ships carrying weapons and explosives entered the Cuban port of Mariel. China has close military relations with Cuba and a military base on Bejucal near Havana. Before an impoverished Russian government reluctantly abandoned it in 2000, the base was its main electronic eavesdropping facility in the tropics. The PRC took over the facility a year later and runs it under the utmost secrecy. The base can intercept civilian phone calls and faxes sent to and from the United States.²⁷ Moscow also no longer gives Cuba any special privileges in weapons acquisitions. Chinese weapons and equipment use Russian technology, making them easy to integrate into the Cuban inventory while not requiring retraining for their use. Chinese companies are also an ideal source for spare parts, maintenance, and upgrades.

A final advantage of the China option is its cheap price. Most Chinese weapons systems are at least twice as affordable as those of the competition. A Russian SU-30 is as expensive as an American F-16, so Chinese aircraft and technical assistance are attractive alternatives. In addition to low-cost systems, China provides flexible and generous terms of payment. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, the PRC sold the Thai military hundreds of APCs, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery, and naval vessels for 10 percent of the usual price and gave Thailand a 10-year period of “good will” before requiring it to begin paying

for them. Beijing is pursuing a similar, albeit for now more limited, strategy in Latin America.

Special case: Cuba. Cuba has increasingly relied on Chinese assistance for its military because of generous terms. China helped Cuba upgrade its air defense system by providing more advanced communications equipment, improving its integration and central control, and assisting with maintenance and spare parts.²⁸ China has also helped the Cuban air force maintain its aging Soviet-era fleet and upgrade some of its MIG-21s. China's Northern Industries supplied the Cuban military with APCs, transport vehicles, and logistics equipment. However, it's unlikely Cuba will make any major arms purchases from the PRC or that China will be willing to supply them. Advanced systems that would significantly enhance Cuban power projection capabilities—such as missiles, J series fighter jets, more capable radar and command systems, and naval assets equipped with cruise missiles—are therefore unlikely to come from China.

Cuba is unlikely to acquire such systems for three reasons. First, its doctrine does not envisage any power projection capability. To do so would be futile because of the proximity and tremendous power of the United States. Despite



AP Photo, Eraldo Peres

China's top legislator Wu Bangguo, left, and Ernesto Heinzlmann, representative of the China-Brazil Business Council, attend a meeting of the China-Brazil Business Council at the Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, Brazil, 31 August 2006.

Despite its anti-American rhetoric, Havana is well aware of the risks of provoking Washington when Cuba no longer enjoys super-power protection.

its anti-American rhetoric, Havana is well aware of the risks of provoking Washington when Cuba no longer enjoys super-power protection. Second, Cuba's anomalous and stagnant economy cannot afford such systems even at Chinese prices. Third, various Cuban officers and others from across Latin America report that the Cuban military is not happy with the quality of Chinese weapons. (A Thai colonel who served over a decade as an armor officer operating Chinese and American tanks said, "Chinese equipment is fairly good in the first two to three years. After that, it gets all rusty. I would rather use a 15-year old American M-11 than a 4-year old Chinese APC.")²⁹

For its part, China believes arming Cuba with advanced weapons systems endangers China's relations with the United States. Challenging the U.S. from a country that neighbors the U.S. and arouses strong emotions in Washington might cost China more than any benefits it gained. Therefore, Beijing is cautious in dealing with Havana. Professor Guo Shuyong, an international relations expert at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, says, "We remember the Monroe Doctrine and respect U.S. influence in Latin America. China is not like the Soviet Union 50 years ago. There will be no Cuban missile crisis."³⁰

During a trip to Latin America in 2004, President Hu Jintao of China spent only a short time in Cuba and while there, refrained from making any comments that gave the impression the PRC intended to forge an alliance with Fidel Castro. Since then, Chinese trade and investment has been rather insignificant when compared with its presence in other South American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina.

Brazilian focus. Brazil is perhaps China's most important relation in Latin America. Two-way trade between Brazil and China reached a staggering \$20 billion in early 2007. China and Brazil have intensified defense and military ties and launched jointly developed satellites with the PRC funding 70 percent of the costs. By cooperating

with the PRC, Brazil may acquire Chinese rocket technology in exchange for its advanced digital optical technology.³¹ Chinese rocket technologies enable Brazil's space program to be self-reliant and advance its secret missile program.

Indeed, reports emanating from U.S. intelligence sources claim China and Brazil have cooperated in sensitive military technology for ballistic missiles and advanced communications. We should not dismiss such a possibility given the advanced state of both nations' military-industrial complexes and the West's reluctance to supply sensitive technology to rising powers.³² Because of the dual-use nature of the technologies involved, Sino-Brazilian cooperation in fields such as civil communications and aviation lends credibility to such a scenario. Brazil's major aviation and arms manufacturing company and the China Aviation Industry Corporation II have jointly developed a medium transport turbojet aircraft, a 30- to 50-seat aircraft with a flying range of 3,000 kilometers and a ceiling of 11,000 meters. They sold 20 aircraft to Chinese airlines, and China may buy another 90.³³

Another area of growing cooperation between the two defense forces is education and training for mid- and senior- ranking officers. Brazilian colonels have graduated from the PLA's prestigious national defense university. Most Brazilian officers attend the PLANDU flagship course, a one-year defense and strategy course for senior officers and area-specific courses such as a one-month course for Caribbean and Latin American flag officers and civilian equivalents.

Brazilian junior officers have attended specialized PLA schools for logistics, artillery, special forces, intelligence, and command and staff, as well as Chinese language courses at PLA schools and some civilian universities. However, few Chinese officers travel to Brazil for military education because only a few speak the Portuguese language well enough to understand staff and strategic level courses. The PLA may also be reluctant to expose its officers to a foreign environment for a long period, particularly young officers vulnerable to cultural influences.

Frequent, high-level visits by military and defense officials are also taking place. Brazilian senior military officers and defense officials have visited the PRC in various capacities, and Brazil

expanded its military attaché office in Beijing to cope with the increase in defense cooperation.³⁴

Conclusion

Looking at China's defense and military relations with Latin America solely from an arms sales perspective belies the true extent of China's influence in the Americas. However, if one looks at defense and military education, visits and exchanges of personnel and equipment, and donations and sales at "friendship prices," it becomes apparent that China's defense relations with the Americas have been on the rise. While these sales are small when compared with those of Latin America's main arms suppliers such as the U.S., Germany, Russia, France, Spain, and Brazil, one must consider how rapidly they have grown. China's rising political and economic power and sophisticated defense diplomacy have allowed it to establish the necessary basis

for future influence. China's strong economic and political presence in Latin America has created the necessary environment for defense and military ties to flourish. Therefore, one may expect China's military influence and arms sales in Latin America to increase. However, the PRC faces considerable challenges. The U.S. has a far longer and deeper defense relationship with Latin America and remains its main arms provider. China also faces competition from other Western nations and regional powers such as Brazil. Chinese weapons have a reputation for low quality and Latin American militaries have used Western equipment for decades. Nevertheless, China is on the march in Latin America. It has made substantial gains in a rather short period of time, and its defense relations with Latin America are multidimensional and sophisticated, reflecting the growing level of refinement and professionalism of the PLA and the Chinese state bureaucracy. **MR**

NOTES

1. See Statement by Charles S. Shapiro, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, before the Senate Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Narcotic Affairs at <<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2005/Sep/22-56242.html>>; Kerry Dambaugh and Mark P. Sullivan, "China's Growing Interest in Latin America," Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, 20 April 2005; Alejandro Kenny, "China's Presence in Latin America: A View on Security from the Southern Cone," *Military Review* (September-October 2006).

2. The author visited the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Command and Staff College in October 2006 and the Navy Technical University in May 2007.

3. Loro Horta, Defense and Military Education: A Dimension of Chinese Power, 29 September 2006 <<http://www.deepjournal.com/p/7/a/en/814.html>>.

4. Comment made by a Uruguayan air force colonel during one of the trips.

5. "Chinese warships arrive in Spain to conduct joint military exercise," *People's Daily*, 14 September 2007; "Chinese warships arrive in Spain to conduct joint military exercise," *People's Daily*, 17 September 2007.

6. *China's National Defense 2006*, Defense White Paper, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 29 December 2006. See also *People's Daily* online archives at <<http://english.people.com.cn/90833/90836/review/>>.

7. The author met some PLA officers who served in Latin American countries in various areas.

8. Agencia de Noticias del Ejército de Bolivia (Bolivian Army News Agency), 10 September 2007.

9. A senior Bolivian naval officer, interview by the author, Beijing, April 2006.

10. Bill Gertz, "China proposes missile replacement for Bolivia," *The Washington Times*, 27 February 2006.

11. Lieutenant Colonel Jawahar Persaud, Guyana Defense Force, interview by the author, December 2007.

12. "China to Build 18 Oil Ships for Venezuela," *Xinhua News Agency*, 4 September 2006.

13. "Venezuela cuenta con premir radar," Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información (Venezuelan Ministry of Communication and Information), 7 July 2007.

14. "Venezuela evaluates Chinese air package," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 October 2001.

15. "Bolivia comprara dos aviones de tecnologia avanzada com credito de China," *Los Tiempos*, La Paz, Bolivia, 8 August 2007.

16. The issue is openly debated in various military related chat rooms throughout Latin America. *Mundo Historia*, based in Peru, focuses on Latin American military history and defense issues, <<http://historia.mforos.com>>. In a conversation with the author, Bolivian Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Omar Zivero also confirmed his country's interest in the Chinese fighter.

17. Interview of Colonel Alvaro Moreno Uruguayan Air Force colonel, Beijing, May 2007.

18. "Urube anuncia que comprara armas a China," *El Universal*, online edition, Caracas, Venezuela, 23 May 2007.

19. "Alerta francesa por helicopteros chinos que comprara el Ejercito," *El Pais*, August 2007.

20. "El Ejercito prubo y esta cerca de comprar um lote de helicopteros chinos," *El Pais*, 12 July 2007.

21. "Argentina evalua plantas para producir equipos militares chinos," *La Nacion*, 22 August 2007. See also "Argentina y China firmanon acuerdo de cooperacion militar," Ministerio de Defensa (Argentine Defense Ministry), press release, 16 May 2007, <www.mindef.gov.ar/info.asp?id=1155&bus=3>.

22. "Negocia la Argentina comprar helicopteros militares a China," *La Nacion*, 17 May 2007; "Firmanon un acuerdo militar con China," *El Pais*, 17 May 2007; "Argentina estudia producir equipos militares chinos, dice ministra Defensa," *Los Tiempos*, 22 August 2007.

23. "Fuerza Aérea de Chile evalúa compra de nuevos helicópteros," *La Nacion*, 9 March 2007.

24. "Z-9 Utility Helicopter," *Sinodefence.com*, <www.sinodefence.com/airforce/helicopter/z9.asp>.

25. Comisión Investigadora de la Deuda Pública Externa 1990-2000, INFORME Nro 00-2-2001-CIDPE, Lima, Peru, 5 December 2001.

26. *SIPRI Yearbook*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 1988 to 1995.

27. Albert Santoli, "China's Strategic Reach into Latin America," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, DC, 21-22 July 2005, <www.uscc.gov/hearings/2005hearings/written_testimonies/05_07_21_22wrts/santoli_albert_wrts.htm>. See also William Ratliff, "Mirroring Taiwan: Cuba and China," *The China Brief*, Vol. 6 Issue 10, May 2006.

28. Despite persistent reports, both Beijing and Havana have strongly denied any arms transactions between the two countries. However, senior military officials from Latin America and the United States interviewed by the author suggested there was a strong possibility that a significant quantity of lethal and non-lethal equipment was indeed sold to Cuba. Among the officials interviewed was a senior American civilian official in charge of the China desk at the National Defense Agency. The author interviewed the American official in late 2004 during a three-month course he attended at a U.S. Defense Department School in Hawaii.

29. The author visited Thailand six times since 2005 and interviewed various Thai army officers. Because of the close nature of Sino-Thai relations, it is not appropriate to identify them. The Thai tank officer cited is a close friend of the author and a colleague from a defense course in the U.S.

30. Quoted in Mark Magnier, "U.S. watching China's Latin American moves," *Times*, 15 April 2006.

31. S. Johnson, "Balancing China's influence in Latin America," Background #1888, The Heritage Foundation, 24 October 2005, <www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg1888.cfm>; "Brazil: Launch Capabilities," The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), <www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg1888.cfm>; available at <<http://cns.miis.edu/research/space/brazil/launch.htm>>; T. Saucen, "The China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellites (CBERS)," International Society for Photogrammetry Research and Remote Sensing, June 2001.

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