

# Strategic Landpower; Restoring U.S. Influence in the Western Hemisphere

by

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## Abstract

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The United States continues to face multiple strategic challenges throughout the globe. Complex issues in the Middle East, Europe and a rebalance to the Pacific have monopolized the U.S. foreign policy agenda, resulting in a loss of U.S. influence in the nearby Latin American Caribbean region. State actors outside the Western Hemisphere, such as China, have taken notice of this perceived vacuum and have sought to advance their own interests in the Americas. China's use of soft power in this developing region is steadily making it the partner of choice over the United States. Today's fiscal austerity further compounds this challenge as the U.S. seeks to address budgetary limitations. However, the United States does have options and one possible solution is Strategic Landpower. Strategic Landpower, if implemented correctly, as part of a holistic approach can make a difference in restoring U.S. influence in the region. Landpower can shape and influence the strategic environment and promote U.S. national interests in the Western Hemisphere by building enduring relationships through military engagement and security cooperation.



## **Strategic Landpower; Restoring U.S. Influence in the Western Hemisphere**

Influencing these people – be they heads of state, militaries and their leaders or even an entire population – remains essential to securing U.S. interests. All elements of national power have an important role in these interactions with other nations and peoples.

—Odierno, Amos and McRaven  
Strategic Landpower Board of Directors<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States has primarily focused its foreign policy agenda on national security challenges in the Middle East and Europe. The heightened U.S. attention to these regions in the world along with a recent policy of a rebalance to the Pacific has created a false perception that the United States no longer has any interest in the Latin American Caribbean (LAC) region. Without visible U.S. attention at the national level, foreign state actors have seized the opportunity to better position themselves in the Western Hemisphere to meet their own national interests.

A major regional power that has taken notice of this perceived U.S. apathy and has sought to further its own interests in the Americas is an emerging China. These past 14 years, China has increasingly employed soft power to better meet its national interests as discernable U.S. commitment in the region has decreased due to long foreign wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. China has leveraged diplomatic, informational, economic and even to a minor extent military power to advance its interests in the LAC region. In November 2008, China published its first policy paper on Latin America. In this paper, China articulated its official strategic objectives of furthering mutual interests through partnerships and common development with the region.

Since 2004, U.S. policymakers have taken notice of China's increased engagement with the LAC region and this has caused uneasiness as Washington assesses its ability to continue influencing the region. The reality is that U.S. clout in the region is waning. As U.S. influence continues to diminish, U.S. strategic partners in the region are increasingly turning to China as the partner of choice; representing lost opportunities for the U.S. in multiple arenas. Fundamentally, the U.S. risks losing its partnerships and influence in the Western Hemisphere if it does not remain engaged. Likewise, at risk are growing achievements that began since the Cold War in the areas of democracy and human rights, improvements in battling poverty, and sustainable economic growth for the region. However, the U.S. does possess capable means to prevent and combat such a challenge.

U.S. engagement in the region must follow a whole of government approach and one of the elements of military power that can best support such an approach is Strategic Landpower. If applied correctly and consistently as a means of military soft power, Strategic Landpower can make a significant impact in restoring U.S. influence and curbing China's growing influence in the LAC region. Strategic emphasis at U.S. and senior Department of Defense (DoD) levels along with proper resourcing must first occur in order for Strategic Landpower to work effectively in the region.

### Strategic Landpower

Strategic Landpower is the application of Landpower towards the achievement of national security objectives across the range of military operations.<sup>2</sup> Landpower is the ability by threat, force, or occupation to gain, sustain, and exploit control over land, resources, and people.<sup>3</sup> Landpower includes the ability to engage to influence, shape,

prevent, and deter in any operational environment.<sup>4</sup> One cannot think of Landpower as solely kinetic ground operations conducted by regular conventional soldiers. Rather, it is a conglomerate of elements, each interacting so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>5</sup> Landpower includes engineering efforts conducted on land, medical operations conducted in clinics and hospitals, sustainment operations, air and sea operations to include transport aviation, and watercraft operations. Landpower is provided primarily by three land forces – the Army, Marines, and Special Forces, with the Army providing the preponderance of forces utilized to apply Landpower in support of national interests. Landpower operates interdependently with the other domains of conflict in a Joint Interagency Intergovernmental Multinational (JIIM) environment to achieve decisive results.

Strategic Landpower as an element of military power is most effective when employed in unison with the other elements of national power as part of a whole of government approach. Throughout history, traditional roles of Landpower as an element of military power have been to defeat and coerce adversaries or potential adversaries through deterrence or compellence, dissuade potential adversaries, reassure allies, and assist the homeland.<sup>6</sup> The application of Landpower in the LAC region should not focus on the deployment of tanks, artillery, or other systems that support kinetic ground operations, but rather on how Landpower can affect the human dimension. Specifically, given the current strategic environment, the application of Landpower in the Americas places emphasis primarily on influencing human behavior to advance U.S. national interests and counter growing external state actor influences in the region.

Landpower can assist greatly in shaping the political and diplomatic dimensions of the strategic environment and not just the military dimension. Specifically, through security cooperation and military engagement activities, Landpower seeks to reassure and provide assistance to our allies to create opportunities for the advancement of U.S. interests that cannot solely be accomplished through diplomatic or political means. Likewise, Landpower in its most traditional role can defeat mutual adversaries of both the U.S. and partner nations within the LAC region. Landpower's missions can vary from traditional disaster relief to combating international crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism, to assisting in the rebuilding of national infrastructure, to responding to ecological disasters and even to supporting the delivery of health care to underserved segments of society.<sup>7</sup>

### Reassurance

In reassuring partner nations, the U.S. seeks to demonstrate the importance of its strategic relationships within a region. The political objective of reassurance is achieved through numerous security cooperation activities and agreements.<sup>8</sup> Security cooperation serves U.S. national interests by advancing U.S. values and beliefs, promoting regional stability, and improving cooperation among allies, partners and friends.<sup>9</sup> Each of these activities occurs with the intent of deepening the relationship between the U.S. and its allies in a region. Reassurance is gained by executing relationship building activities during peacetime and then reinforced during times of crisis.

The U.S. can demonstrate reassurance when it employs Landpower to illustrate U.S. commitment to a regional partner. For example, the deployment of U.S. ground

forces in support of a partner nation during times of crisis is a clear manifestation of U.S. commitment and trust. Reassurance is achieved through the forward presence of U.S. forces and this ensures allies and friends know that the U.S. will honor its security commitments and continue to be a reliable security partner.<sup>10</sup> During peacetime, security cooperation is furthered through engagement shaping activities. These shaping activities may include rotational deployments for exercises and training conducted by Regionally Aligned Forces, building partner capacity, security force assistance, civil affairs support for stabilization, reconstruction and development efforts, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism and support to counterterrorism, foreign humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and foreign attendance in U.S. professional military education activities such as the Army War College, Intermediate Level Education, and Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning.<sup>11</sup>

Strategic Landpower can have a profound effect during peacetime and not only during hostilities. In a non-combat environment, engagement activities in the land domain can work effectively to attain desired U.S. national objectives. The LAC region's forces are predominantly land oriented, and therefore, the United States' best option from a military power perspective is utilizing Landpower. Landpower helps shape the international environment by engaging with partners, fostering mutual understanding through military-to-military contacts, and helping allies build the capacity to defend themselves.<sup>12</sup> The essential by-product of engagement activities is the creation of lasting relationships that demonstrate U.S. commitment and trust. A great tool noted earlier is foreign attendance in U.S. professional military education programs and other types of military exchange programs. The exchanges enable the United States to

extend its influence or military soft power through international networks of military professionals.<sup>13</sup> Military exchange programs at U.S. war and staff colleges are very influential because they impact people who are likely to be in elite leadership positions within their countries.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. can provide assistance as well to demonstrate its commitment as a global leader that lives up to its responsibilities of resolving mutual global challenges.

### Assistance

In providing assistance, the U.S. utilizes Landpower during contingency operations to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Applying Landpower to conduct humanitarian and disaster relief operations serves to promote both U.S. interests and regional stability for host nation governments in need of U.S. assistance. Strategic Landpower in this capacity leaves a distinct positive impression on the local community and helps to positively influence host nations when political leverage is needed.<sup>15</sup> By leaving such an impression, Landpower can affect the political dimension by changing the beliefs and preferences of a state actor to one that is more aligned with U.S. interests. Soft power is the ability to change someone's values, beliefs, and preferences.<sup>16</sup> In this capacity, the U.S. employs Landpower as a means of military soft power to change the LAC region's negative perception of the U.S. as an imperialistic country that does not care about the region. It also can use Landpower to lessen the region's growing preference of other state actors outside the Western Hemisphere.

### Defeat

While the application of Landpower in a "soft" manner has its usefulness in the LAC region, so does the use of Landpower in a "hard" way. In the past, the U.S. has

employed Landpower to defeat its adversaries. The U.S. and the LAC region have mutual adversaries that threaten the security of both the region and the United States. These mutual adversaries include transnational crime organizations and extremist terrorist organizations. Landpower can assist host nation forces to deal with terrorist organizations or transnational crime organizations that are too powerful for them to deal with solely. The U.S. possesses extensive capabilities that can greatly assist in dealing with these common threats. For example, the U.S. can provide Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) support, command and control (C2) support, logistical support, cyberspace support, special operations support and Foreign Internal Defense training. Having an understanding of the key roles that Landpower can perform and its unique capabilities will greatly enable the advancement of U.S. interests in the LAC region.

#### U.S. Interests in Latin America and the Caribbean

The United States has four enduring core national interests and all of these interests relate in one aspect or another to the strategic environment of its neighbors within the Western Hemisphere. The U.S. core national interests consist of: the security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners; a strong innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity; respect for universal values at home and around the world; and a rules based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.<sup>17</sup> The National Security Strategy of 2015 has conveyed the United States' desire to "deepen economic and security cooperation in the Americas and advance a Western Hemisphere that is prosperous, secure, democratic and plays a greater global

role.”<sup>18</sup> The U.S. has broad economic, security, cultural, and historical ties with the countries of the LAC region and it must continue to nurture these connections in order to maintain its influence.<sup>19</sup>

The United States and its neighbors from the Americas are intrinsically linked by their close proximity, integrated economic markets, energy interdependence, shared values and beliefs in democracy, and cultural ties. The U.S. shares a border with Mexico that stretches 1,954 miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. The Western Hemisphere remains a vital partner of the U.S. economically and many of the region’s countries are the U.S. biggest trading partners. Since the Obama Administration, U.S. exports to Latin America have increased by more than \$200 billion to \$650 billion and today comprise 42 percent of the overall U.S. exports and this makes the U.S. the region’s single largest export destination.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the growth of the U.S. economy depends on the success of the Latin American economy, and this makes the LAC region very significant to the United States. In 2013, the U.S. imported oil from the Latin American countries of Mexico (11%), Venezuela (9.8%), Colombia (4.8%), and Ecuador (3.0%), constituting 28.6% of the total 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil imported by the U.S. in 2013.<sup>21</sup> Historically, the United States as a former colony itself shares a common past and values with the region’s countries and 15% of the U.S. total population is comprised of people of Hispanic origin. In simplest terms, the Western Hemisphere’s interdependence makes the regional security, stability, and prosperity of the LAC region a vital interest to the United States. The U.S. has many national level concerns for why it closely monitors the challenges the region faces.

Within the 2015 National Security Strategy, the U.S. identified several major challenges facing the LAC region. These challenges include weak institutions, powerful organized crime groups, high crime rates, an illicit drug trade, lingering economic disparity, and inadequate education and health systems.<sup>22</sup> Weak institutions can succumb to negative influences from both powerful syndicates and state actors that seek to undermine U.S. interests. Violence and illicit activities can undermine the well-being and safety of ordinary citizens in both the region and the United States. Extreme poverty and lack of social service programs can serve as catalysts for poor communities to seek radical solutions for challenges they perceive as unsurmountable. For example, the migration of unaccompanied children across national borders and the acceptance of radical ideologies occur as a result of despair to such challenges. All of these issues interconnect with what the U.S. views as the top strategic risks to U.S. interests. These risks include security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including transnational organized crime), major energy market disruptions, global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown, and threats or attacks against U.S. citizens abroad and our allies.<sup>23</sup> To combat such risks, the U.S. policy on Latin America is to promote democracy and universal rights, strengthen regional security, and advance economic opportunities while protecting against climate change. However, U.S. engagement with the region since 2001 has considerably decreased.

The costly wars in the Greater Middle East along with the Great Recession of 2008 created a fiscally constrained environment that has persisted for several years and limited the United States' ability to engage sufficiently with the region. Prior to 2001, the U.S. engagement focused primarily on supporting anti-Communist regimes in Latin

America and the establishment of free trade areas within the region. Beginning with the Reagan Administration, presidential visits to the Americas steadily increased until 2001. After September 11, 2001, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East occupied the attention of U.S. policymakers, leaving a vacuum for others to fill. Specifically, by neglecting Latin America, the United States has opened a door for external powers to fill the political vacuum by antagonistic nations to U.S. hegemony in the region, which may in the future include the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>24</sup> As a result, China's influence in Latin America has grown because the U.S. government did not prioritize its relationship with Latin America during the Bush Administration.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, limited engagement during the Obama Administration has not improved U.S. clout in the region either.

The influence of transnational criminal organizations and transnational terrorist organizations has grown considerably. Clan-based, Lebanese Hezbollah-associated criminal networks exploit free trade zones and permissive areas in places like Venezuela, and the Triple Frontier to engage in money laundering and other illegal endeavors, as well as recruitment and radicalization efforts.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, transnational criminal organizations engaging in drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal immigration, and organized crime have exploited the political vacuum caused by reduced U.S. involvement in the region. Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, best expressed this concern as "Drug trafficking and transnational crime are threats to the rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean and also threaten U.S. national security, and strengthening the region's capacity to combat them is in our national interest."<sup>27</sup> The principal strategic imperative

of Latin America for the United States historically has been, and continues to be, its geographic and economic connectedness to this country and, by extension, the potential for a powerful extra-hemispheric actor to use the region to harm the United States or impair its ability to act in other parts of the world in the event of a future conflict.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, any significant populism on a regional scale will have significant impact to the United States' security and prosperity. China's growing influence in the region can pose such a threat.

Considerable evidence exists that substantiate a decay of U.S. influence in the LAC region. Economically, the U.S. market share of trade in the region has declined. For instance, despite an increase in U.S. exports to Latin America in dollar terms over the past decade, the U.S.'s share of Latin American trade declined from 53 percent to 39 percent over the same period.<sup>29</sup> China, on the other hand, has pledged to invest \$250 billion in Latin America over the next ten years. The increased Chinese investment and financing in itself should raise U.S. concern if China's intention is only resource extraction and not supporting diversification of the LAC region's economy. If the LAC region depends only on resource extraction for revenue creation, the region will not have sustainable economic growth and social expansion. This is of concern as Latin America plays a crucial role in the consumption of goods and services that the United States supplies.<sup>30</sup> If the region's purchasing power were to decrease, the end result will be a reduction in demand for U.S. goods. Another consequence of the increased Chinese trade is the ability of trans-pacific criminal organizations to take advantage of the increased trade to conduct illicit trafficking into the United States.

U.S. political and military influences in the region have eroded since 2001. Politically, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was created in 2011 as an alternative to the U.S. led Organization of American States (OAS). The fact that the most recent CELAC summit was held in Havana only served to underscore a lack of coherent U.S. policy in the region.<sup>31</sup> Partnering with China seems to be CELAC's way of hedging against U.S. dominance in the region – just as some states in the Asia-Pacific are edging closer to the U.S. in a bid against growing Chinese power.<sup>32</sup> Lastly from a security perspective, LAC countries have expanded their military engagements with China in multiple ways. LAC countries have increased their purchases of Chinese military equipment, high level senior military visits, and military educational exchange programs. The broadened Chinese engagement in multiple strategic dimensions has the potential for serious consequences if the U.S. and the PRC became adversaries. The U.S. must consider how the economic, political, and military positions of an “adversarial” China in the Western Hemisphere could impact the U.S. ability to mount a timely and sustained response to that adversary in the non-Western Hemisphere location from which the crisis emanates.<sup>33</sup> For example, a major conflict in the Pacific's South China Sea where China seeks to act in the Western Hemisphere to distract, delay, or undermine the U.S. effort against them or otherwise harm the U.S. in its own “neighborhood” can have major strategic consequences.<sup>34</sup>

The United States' past history along with present day resentment against the U.S. inhibit the United States' ability to deal with the rising influence of China in the Americas. Perceptions of American Imperialism that stem back to the origins of the Panama Canal and the Monroe Doctrine serve as one of the principal factors creating

today's regional mistrust of the United States. Additionally, a perception of the American "policeman" in the Western Hemisphere that interferes in the domestic affairs of sovereign states still pervades. Past military interventions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in both Central America and the Caribbean also serve as justification for the region's hedging against U.S. dominance. Secretary of State John Kerry has tried to combat such negative perceptions in his strategic messaging by conveying:

The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over. The relationship that we seek and that we have worked hard to foster is not about a United States declaration about how and when it will intervene in the affairs of other American states. It's about all of our countries viewing one another as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues, and adhering not to doctrine, but to the decisions that we make as partners to advance the values and the interest that we share.<sup>35</sup>

This messaging, although beneficial, at international institutions such as the Organization of American States does not always disseminate down to the common local communities plagued by various social challenges. However, the real greatest challenge the U.S. faces in the region is a powerful culture of resentment, a rage against the prevailing system brought on by social exclusion and persistent poverty.<sup>36</sup>

In Latin America, the challenge is a highly combustible blend of poverty, crime, despair, and antidemocratic sentiments with a strong admixture of anti-Americanism.<sup>37</sup> The United States has historically promoted the expansion of democracy in Latin America and has made deliberate efforts to prevent any other form of government in the Western Hemisphere. However, the U.S. democratic model has not created the prosperity that the region's people expect. The failings of putative democracies have added to the culture of resentment a sense that all efforts to address the socio-economic failures throughout Latin America have not worked and apparently will not work.<sup>38</sup> Nearly 28.8 percent, 167 million people, of Latin America's population live in

poverty and this in itself delegitimizes the principles of democracy. With such disbelief, the LAC region has responded by seeking an alternative solution to the American democratic model, namely the Chinese model.

#### Chinese Interests in Latin America and the Caribbean Region

On November 5, 2008, China published its first white paper on Latin America and the Caribbean. According to this white paper, China's official policy on Latin America and the Caribbean is to: promote mutual respect, mutual trust, expand common ground; Deepen cooperation and achieve win-win results; draw on each other's strengths to boost common progress/intensify exchanges; and One China Principle policy is basis for development of relations.<sup>39</sup> China's broad political policy concerning the region serves to strengthen national interests that transcend beyond just the extraction of resources. China views the LAC region as an emerging market from which to drive its own growth in the world economy. Specifically, China seeks to attain reliable energy and food security in order to sustain its economic growth and prosperity for achieving regional hegemony in East Asia and possibly world dominance. China has two supporting objectives in regards to the region as well. The first supporting goal pertains to the exportation of Chinese goods to the LAC region's markets and the second supporting objective concerns Taiwan. Globally there exists 25 countries that maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan and 12 of them reside in the LAC region. Beijing intends to isolate Taiwan by luring the 12 LAC nations to shift their diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China.<sup>40</sup> In trying to further understand China's interests, one must refer to the theorist Sun Tzu and the realism international relations perspective.

Sun Tzu greatly influences the different factors China takes into strategic consideration when developing strategy to achieve its interests. China views military struggle as not only involving the military but also diplomacy and economics as well. Sun Tzu placed great emphasis on economics and the financial situation of a state. China understands very well that the dependence of modern wars on economics is far greater than in the past. Additionally, China is taking a realist approach in its dealings with the LAC region. China is pursuing its national interests and trying to acquire as many resources from Latin America just like it is doing in Africa to fuel its own rise on the global stage. In Latin America, China has actively leveraged soft power and economic power to maintain access to energy resources and markets as well as to gain support for its one-China policy.<sup>41</sup>

China's soft power consists of five key components which include Foreign Direct Investment, Humanitarian Assistance, personnel exchange programs, diplomacy, and participation in multilateral institutions.<sup>42</sup> China's money is particularly attractive to many developing countries because it does not come with the "human rights conditions, good governance requirements, approved-project restrictions, and environmental quality regulations that are tied to money from Western governments."<sup>43</sup> Although many believe China does not intend to replace the U.S. as the Western Hemisphere's dominant power, other questions still remain. Will China use its new power to politically influence other nations in a coercive manner during its "peaceful" rise? And, once the "Dragon" has fully awakened can it actually challenge the U.S. for its role as the global superpower? From a realist perspective, China will do what it must to achieve its

national interests and reclaim China's "proper place" in history. Currently, China's preferred method for achieving such aspirations is soft power.

The core of Chinese soft power in Latin America is the widespread perception that the PRC, because of its sustained high rates of economic growth and technology development, will present tremendous business opportunities in the future and will be a power to be reckoned with globally.<sup>44</sup> Several examples exist to substantiate such a regional perception of China. For instance, in 2014 China had the second biggest economy in the world at \$10 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is currently the second largest trading partner for Latin America. In 2012, China's bilateral trade with Latin America as a region increased over 8 percent to \$261 billion.<sup>45</sup>

The Chinese presence in the Western Hemisphere creates a new alignment for governments that have nurtured an anti-American foreign policy sentiment.<sup>46</sup> The behavior of regimes such as those of Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Argentina suggests that the availability of P.R.C. as a market, and as an alternative source of credit, investment and goods has undercut the willingness of those states to follow policies advanced by the United States on issues such as democratic governance, human rights, free trade, and cooperation on issues of organized crime.<sup>47</sup> For example, of the more than \$100 billion that China's banks have loaned to the region since 2005, more than three quarters has gone to the nations of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) and Argentina.<sup>48</sup> China's financial support to countries within ALBA also serves to weaken existing regional institutions such as the Organization of American States (OAS). Chinese political goals have materialized through the use of foreign direct investments (FDI) as well.

China has achieved success in its One-China policy by adding stipulations to any foreign direct investment it makes. Acceptance of the One-China policy is one of the few conditions that Beijing insists of Latin American countries that receive Chinese foreign investment.<sup>49</sup> For example, Grenada switched its diplomatic relations from Taiwan to PRC in 2005 and then received more than \$14 million in FDI in 2011 from China. Costa Rica switched its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China as well after it received increased international aid from China. China has used its diplomacy effectively to also enter democratic institutions in Latin American and the Caribbean. Although the PRC has been welcomed as an observer at the OAS since 2004, it has chosen CELAC, which explicitly excludes the United States and Canada, as its preferred vehicle for engaging with Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>50</sup>

China has effectively conducted senior leader visits to advance its agenda in the LAC region. Beijing executed several high profile visits to the LAC region in 2001, 2004, 2005 and lastly in 2013 with a presidential visit to the countries of Mexico, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago. This was reciprocated by presidential level visits from Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil to China. Furthermore, since 2001 China has signed strategic partnerships agreements with the countries of Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Peru. Beijing reinforces its diplomatic and economic initiatives to advance PRC interests with military efforts in numerous ways.

Militarily, China continues to conduct a mixture of military equipment sales, officer exchange programs, and joint training exercises to support its diplomatic and economic engagements in the Americas. Today, China's military exchanges occur more frequently which serve to bridge the cultural gap that exists between it and regional

partners in Latin America. By donating equipment and sponsoring visits by Latin American military officers to People's Liberation Army (PLA) facilities, China is deepening military relations with regional counterparts as it familiarizes its friends in the Americas with its practices.<sup>51</sup> Over 100 officers from at least 12 countries have graduated from PLA programs related to military doctrine and national defense.<sup>52</sup>

China has supplemented its military exchange programs with equipment sales that include satellites and intelligence-gathering equipment. Chinese technology companies are partnering with Venezuela, Brazil, and Bolivia to launch imagery and communication satellites.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, China has exported conventional weapons in Latin America to countries that include Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Two of these countries, Peru and Colombia, have strategic agreements with the United States. In Cuba, China has operated a signal intelligence station in Bejucal since 1999 while providing the Cuban government with equipment to block Radio Marti signals from the United States.<sup>54</sup> China's increased regional presence along with intelligence opportunities, like in Cuba, give the PLA enhanced capabilities to gather intelligence on the U.S. if needed during conflict.

From a training perspective, China has conducted several joint exercises in the region to further improve its position. One example is the Angel de la Paz with Peruvians on a humanitarian mission.<sup>55</sup> In 2013, the Chinese Navy conducted a goodwill visit in Brazil, Chile and Argentina and conducted its first-ever naval exercise with the Argentine Navy.<sup>56</sup> While the PRC does not currently show an interest in establishing military bases or alliances in Latin America or the Caribbean, its expanding economic presence and commercial capabilities in the region in areas such as logistics,

telecommunications, and space gives it numerous options for shaping the outcomes of a crisis involving the U.S. and our allies in Asia, were one to occur.<sup>57</sup> If necessary, China can easily convert all of its military, diplomatic and economic engagements, to “hard power” to coerce a Latin American country to carry out its will. Such coercion can occur in the form of aggressive economic sanctions, technology controls, restrictive regulations, arms control, and possibly even overseas presence.

China’s accumulating soft power in the region has raised questions as to whether past U.S. efforts have taken root enough to resist Chinese influence. Namely, China’s mix of economic engagement and soft power has spurred some fears that Western influence in developing regions will thereby be diminished and that investments in governance, transparency, and accountability will be undermined, particularly in states rich in natural resources but whose governments often lack legitimacy or national vision.<sup>58</sup> In summary, Beijing continues to patiently build relationships throughout the LAC region with an eye to expanding its influence, opening defense markets, and eroding U.S. dominance.<sup>59</sup> However, the U.S. can overcome this challenge and expand its own influence through the application of Strategic Landpower. As the nation rebuilds after 13 years of war and a Great Recession, the U.S. can apply Strategic Landpower to reconnect with the region as other elements of U.S. national power regain their strength.

#### Landpower Operations in the LAC Region

The United States experiences in shaping and influencing the global strategic environment with Landpower have proven successful so far during the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The U.S. can easily refer to recent experiences in Haiti and West Africa for lessons learned on Landpower’s use for restoring U.S. influence. Landpower effectively

provided disaster relief and humanitarian assistance during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. During both of these crises, the U.S. applied Landpower to provide leadership and ground support to deal with the turmoil and calamities each region faced and Landpower worked in an integrated fashion with JIIM partners to achieve positive results.<sup>60</sup>

In Haiti, approximately 22,000 Soldiers deployed by air to support the Department of State and other U.S. Agencies such as USAID in dealing with the humanitarian crisis. Likewise, in Africa, Landpower proved effective as 3,000 Soldiers deployed to West Africa via air to Liberia and Senegal to lead the coordination of aid operations, build treatment facilities, and train healthcare workers in the infected region.<sup>61</sup> In both of these humanitarian and disaster relief crises, Landpower decisively enabled the U.S. to meet its national strategic objectives of preventing the spread of a pandemic disease to U.S. borders and reassuring allies of U.S. commitment as the world leader to resolving mutual global challenges.<sup>62</sup>

By responding first with significant Landpower capabilities and monetary resources, the U.S. overshadowed the limited contributions of state competitors such as China and ultimately increased its own influence in these regions. Military personnel on the ground has always been the ultimate expression of U.S. commitment in any situation, especially during a crisis. China's commitment in human terms amounted to only 103 and 143 relief personnel respectively during the Haiti and West Africa crises. The U.S. can demonstrate as well the effective use of Landpower in the LAC Region. In fact, the United States currently expends considerable Landpower resources in the Americas and Caribbean region.

The U.S. Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM) principle Landpower components – Army, Marines, and SOF have conducted numerous operations and engagements towards its objective of reaffirming U.S. commitment towards the region. During the fiscal year 2013 (FY13), U.S. Army South (ARSOUTH) conducted 166 security cooperation events and engagements in 19 countries in U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility.<sup>63</sup> These acts served to build partner nation capability and capacity within the LAC region's militaries. Cooperation and engagement activities occurred principally in the realm of security, humanitarian assistance, and diplomacy.

ARSOUTH's security cooperation activities concentrated on countering terrorism and transnational crime organizations. Notable activities included building partner nation capacity to counter terrorism in ten countries, countering transnational organized crime with the Guatemalan Interagency Task Force, logistics security cooperation to build partner nation's ability to support critical security operations, intelligence security cooperation to counter transnational threats in Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Peru, and lastly continuous operational support through a persistent forward deployed ISR presence in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras. These security cooperation activities serve to negate Chinese influence by assisting partner nations on major security challenges that Chinese military engagements presently cannot support.

Humanitarian Assistance accomplishments by ARSOUTH concentrated on building partner capability and capacity to deal with natural disasters and providing basic services to local communities. ARSOUTH executed its Humanitarian Assistance Program to build partner nation capacity in providing essential services to civilian

population through construction projects in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Peru. ARSOUTH also assisted partner nations with expanding their capacity to conduct personnel recovery operations through search and rescue during natural disasters. Other noteworthy activities included ARSOUTH's Conference of the American Armies with 25 countries and two International Military Organizations to develop procedures for peacekeeping and disaster relief operations to improve interoperability and collective capacity of its members. Lastly, ARSOUTH executed several combined-joint training exercises such as Integrated Advance 2013, PANAMAX 2013, and Beyond the Horizon 2013. These exercises assist the U.S. and its allies in the region to counter illegal migration in the Caribbean Sea, defend the Panama Canal, provide humanitarian and civic assistance construction projects, improve medical readiness, and develop other infrastructure projects.

U.S. military humanitarian assistance to poverty stricken communities if combined with strong strategic communications can counter the growing influence of Chinese foreign direct investments to these same communities. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs identifies "physiological needs" such as food, water, and clean air as the most pressing needs for human survival.<sup>64</sup> "Safety needs" such as personal security, financial security, and health/well-being are the next most important once survival needs have been met.<sup>65</sup> Chinese FDIs to high profile projects such as stadiums or roads that support only resource extraction do not give attention to these immediate needs. U.S. humanitarian assistance and previously noted security cooperation activities on the other hand do address such physiological and safety needs.

ARSOUTH's military diplomacy efforts emphasize improving military relations and supporting international institutions. Particularly, ARSOUTH carried out professional development exchanges in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to improve civil-military relations. It also led staff talks to strengthen key leader relations by conducting four staff talks with the Armies of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and El Salvador and 1 working group meeting with Peru. And finally, ARSOUTH supported the Global Peace Operations Initiative program to enhance international security capacity to conduct UN and regional peace support operations. These examples of military diplomacy can support the U.S. Government's overall diplomatic efforts in the region and offset China's own diplomatic measures by building ties with civil and military leaders that exert considerable influence in their countries. Strategic Landpower's other two components provide many contributions as well in the LAC region.

Marine Corps Forces South (MARFORSOUTH) has conducted several operations to support U.S. interests in the region. MARFORSOUTH operations to build partner capacity in countering regional threats include the use of civil affairs teams, joint riverine training teams, and security cooperation teams. MARFORSOUTH also executes several combined training exercises which include the Southern Partnership Station, Tradewinds, Exercise Unitas, and participates in the ARSOUTH's Integrated Advance and New Horizon exercises. Southern Partnership Station focuses on community relations projects that enhance partnerships, shared interests and values. Exercise Tradewinds promotes security and partnership with 16 nations within the Caribbean Basin to reduce illicit trafficking. Lastly, Exercise Unitas enhances interoperability and security cooperation with 9 partner nation naval infantries.

The last major component of Landpower, Special Operations, has concentrated its efforts in the LAC region on building partner capacity, civil affairs, information operations, intelligence analytical support to U.S. Country Teams, Logistics Training and Advisory Teams, Building Intellectual Capital, and training exercises such as Fuerzas Comando. In 2013, SOCSOUTH maintained small elements in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador working with key units to improve ground and maritime interdiction, civil affairs, and intelligence capacities.<sup>66</sup> In the Andean Ridge, SOCSOUTH partnered with Colombia and Peru to confront narco-terrorist insurgencies whose illicit trafficking operations extend through the hemisphere.<sup>67</sup> Civil Affairs teams worked with eight partner nations to reduce susceptibility of local communities to transnational crime organizations. During Information operations, SOCSOUTH maintained military information support teams in seven key partner nations supporting the DoD Rewards Program, U.S. government anti-trafficking in Persons Program, and partner nation counter-recruitment programs to counter transnational crime and violent extremist organizations.<sup>68</sup> Intelligence Analytical Support to U.S. Country Teams and partner nations such as Colombia and Peru has helped to institutionalize intelligence gathering operations in these countries. SOCSOUTH in conjunction with the Colombian Joint Staff College led a Counter-terrorism Fellowship Program seminar in Bogota, Colombia in September 2013 where 12 countries from the Western Hemisphere participated.<sup>69</sup>

Within the LAC region, SOUTHCOM has wisely employed other available capabilities and resources to further U.S. influence in the Americas. For instance, SOUTHCOM has a joint task force (JTF) named JTF-Bravo in Honduras that focuses on disrupting transnational crime organizations by supporting Honduran law enforcement

against illicit trafficking. Working with Honduran and U.S. interagency partners, JTF-Bravo has treated more than 8,243 medical patients, 1,754 dental patients, 1,052 immunizations, and 313 surgical patients during 2013.<sup>70</sup> Another Landpower resource is the National Guard State Partnership program. The National Guard State Partnership program (SPP) has played an integral role in building interpersonal relationships within the LAC region. In SOUTHCOM'S area of responsibility (AOR), 17 U.S. states have active partnerships with defense and security forces from 22 nations in the Caribbean, Central and South America (See Figure 1).<sup>71</sup>



Figure 1. Participating U.S. States in the LAC Region<sup>72</sup>

The National Guard works with individual U.S. Ambassadors in support of their country plan. In FY13, SPP completed 233 security cooperation events in the U.S. and abroad that supported SOUTHCOM'S mission. Another integral element of Landpower that contributes to nurturing relationships between the U.S. and LAC region is the U.S. military educational and professional exchange programs.

Hosting military personnel from less democratic countries is one important way to build the knowledge and experience necessary for people to build and sustain democratic institutions and practices.<sup>73</sup> Educational and Professional Exchange Programs currently exist within the U.S. at the junior officer level, mid-grade officer level, and senior leader level. Latin American officers currently attend the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation and the Inter-American Defense College. Their attendance gives the U.S. opportunities to build relationships with the future senior military leaders of the region. Another example that illustrates relationship building through military educational program is Latin American officer attendance at senior leader institutions such as Army War College. During the academic year 2015, officers from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru attended the Army War College. All of these noted instances of Landpower have contributed significantly in making conditions favorable towards the achievement of U.S. interests in the LAC region. However, Landpower's ability to influence and shape positive outcomes in the region can have a greater effect with several additional considerations. These considerations pertain to strategic communications, Regionally Aligned Forces, educational and professional exchanges, "lighter footprint" considerations, and creating enduring positive outcomes.

#### Making Landpower More Effective in the LAC Region

In order to improve Landpower's effectiveness, the U.S. must first make sure strategic communications support the achievements of the ground operations conducted. The objective of strategic communication is to provide audiences with truthful and timely information that will influence them to support the objectives of the

communicator.<sup>74</sup> In the LAC region where approximately 450 million people live, its inhabitants speak 4 principal languages and dozens of dialects. Such a diversity in languages and dialects stresses the importance of getting information delivered correctly to the right audience in a timely manner. The strategic message must resonate with the audience because it shares appropriate human values, such as liberty, justice, honesty, economic improvement, security, fair treatment, and so forth.<sup>75</sup>

During the humanitarian exercise (New Horizons) in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 2006, U.S. troops from SOUTHCOM participated in a series of joint endeavors with the Dominican armed forces to build clinics and dig wells.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, SOUTHCOM did not execute its strategic communication plan well, and as the Los Angeles Times reported, “As the equipment and troops amassed over weeks with little explanation in the local media, suspicions deepened that the Americans were engaged in something more than a humanitarian mission.”<sup>77</sup> As a result, negative perceptions formed within the local community and media. When applying any tools of strategic communication such as public affairs, medical outreach, engineer support, or logistics, those employing Landpower must tailor the message correctly in order to highlight the benefits of partnering with the United States. Another dynamic related to strategic communications concerns the allocation of Regionally Aligned Forces (RAFTs).

Regionally Aligned Forces are Army units and leaders who focus on a specific region within their normal training program by receiving cultural training and language familiarization.<sup>78</sup> RAFTs can have a positive effect by developing enduring relationships, interoperability, and enabling greater access through the process of familiarity. There is no need to constantly re-introduce oneself over again. RAFTs can help frame the

strategic environment through shaping operation activities. Shaping operation activities focus on developing ally capabilities, improving information exchange, and intelligence sharing – all things the regionally aligned force does.<sup>79</sup> The challenge that exists however pertains to the projected allocation of RAFs to the LAC region.

The U.S. Army began implementation of its regionally aligned concept in 2013 with minimal allocation of forces to the LAC region. Current allocation consists of one divisional headquarters, one military intelligence brigade, and one medical brigade. This allocation is minimal in comparison to the other combatant command AORs. By 2017, the projected increase consists of one divisional headquarters and four regionally aligned brigades. These regionally aligned brigades consist of: 1 x military intelligence brigade, 1 x sustainment brigade, 1 x medical brigade, and 1 x brigade combat team. The preponderance of RAFs will continue to reside in PACOM, EUCOM, and NORTHCOM AORs. A rebalancing of reserve component brigades from NORTHCOM to SOUTHCOM's AOR will provide the necessary force structure that SOUTHCOM requires to execute its security cooperation and engagement activities appropriately. By rebalancing brigades only from NORTHCOM to SOUTHCOM, the U.S. can still maintain the necessary forces to support missions in the very important Pacific and European regions. Furthermore, additional National Guard State Partnerships will greatly complement any additional reserve component brigades that SOUTHCOM receives. Likewise, the U.S. DoD needs to increase touch points between the U.S. Army and partner nations in the educational arena.

The U.S. military is in a position to wield a tremendous amount of soft power because its culture, values, and policies are held in high esteem both within the United

States and within the armed forces of many countries around the world.<sup>80</sup> Military education exchanges and professional exchange programs (PEP) both serve as great conduits for applying such soft power. At the Senior Service College level, expanding the program to include the wider Caribbean states and additional Central and South American countries will greatly assist in promoting the professionalism and universal ideals that the U.S. seeks to germinate throughout the Western Hemisphere. Countries to consider for attendance at the Army War College include Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. Professional exchange positions also need to occur more frequently. Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) have the capacity to serve in multiple roles and not just as liaison officers. Employing FAOs as U.S. instructors in partner nation professional military education programs will serve well to advance U.S. interests in the region. Currently, the majority of PEP positions reside in Europe and reallocating some of these positions with an “eye to the future” in the LAC region makes sense.

At the tactical and operational level, International Military Education Training (IMET) must expand beyond just the traditional core branches. Expanding partner nation attendance beyond the traditional combat arms courses to include Logistics, Signal, and Engineering Captain Career Courses will help build partner capacity in the areas of infrastructure development and support. Likewise, U.S. training must continue to include professionalism, ethics, and respect for human rights as it has in the past. Partner nations turn to the U.S. because of what we can accomplish and what they perceive we can achieve. Partner nations in the region see the discipline, professionalism, and resources the U.S. invests in leader development and they want to

capitalize on this. Basically, U.S. partner nations see a professional army that promotes universal values and this differentiates the U.S. from China. Regional partner nations understand the returns on this investment. They view it as well as an investment in future leaders that can translate to national level leader development. By doing so, the U.S. utilizes Landpower to improve the region's land force and create conditions that allow access and influence in the region.

As the U.S. gains access to new partner nations in the region, initial security cooperation and engagement activities with a smaller scaled force will work best. A "light footprint" approach to military engagement presents several benefits to U.S. DoD policymakers during the implementation of Landpower in newly formed partnerships. First, the "light footprint" model will help avoid unfavorable impressions of "American Imperialists" fomenting within the local communities. Second, the U.S. continues to have numerous commitments around the globe. In this era of constrained resources at home and multiplying security challenges abroad, the "light footprint" approach to military engagement will quickly become central to U.S. strategy.<sup>81</sup> With projected decreases in defense spending, the "light footprint" model along with RAFs provide a solution to address today's fiscal austerity. The "light footprint" approach will add further credibility to the existing civilian presence at a U.S. embassy in a partner nation by demonstrating U.S. commitment with land forces.

Under this concept, the military works in support of the U.S. embassy country team, and military personnel are firmly under the oversight of the chief of mission.<sup>82</sup> Military activities in the broad range of intelligence, information, diplomacy, and development are planned and approved in the context of more sustainable, civilian-led

efforts to address partner nation challenges.<sup>83</sup> The “light footprint” approach is not a “one size fits all” model and must be tempered with existing access, mission requirements, and projected acceptance of a greater force structure (see Figure 2). The intent is to start off small with a “light footprint” model using SOF and then gradually employ RAFs that can range from a company-size element to a full brigade size element depending on the mission. Communication between the Chief of Missions and Defense Attaches with combatant commands will be essential to ensure the right footprint is implemented. The “light footprint” approach also helps to minimize partner nation dependence on U.S. resources and minimize the chances of backlash from the local population.<sup>84</sup>

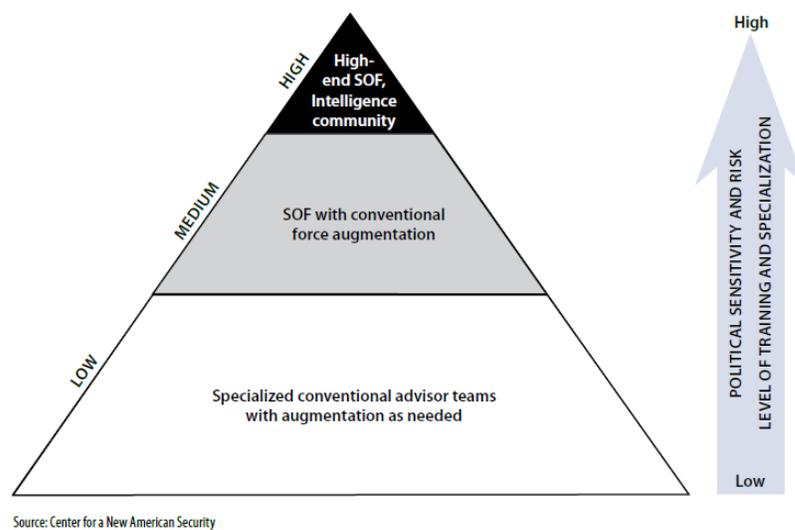


Figure 2. From Modular Units to Regional Alignment, Tiered Units and Specialized Capabilities<sup>85</sup>

Strategic Landpower contributions in the LAC region must aim to have a lasting impact. Short-lived achievements will only serve to raise questions about U.S. commitment and can cause resentment. This will most likely lead to partner nations comparing U.S. commitment to high profile Chinese investments in the region. By

developing a partner nation's capability and capacity from a longevity perspective, states within the LAC region will have a greater appreciation for U.S. efforts to make them self-reliant. All construction and engineering developments, educational investments, medical operations, military training exercises, and support operations led by U.S. land forces must remain true to the belief that such contributions will lead to host nation self-reliance. For example, any well, clinic, and school that is built must be accompanied with the U.S. training that will result in future engineers, medics, nurses, doctors, and teachers belonging to the partner nation.

Contributions that promote self-reliance will lead to positive economic and social inclusion, and this helps erase the cultural resentment and Anti-Americanism that hinders U.S. influence in the region. Fundamentally, such efforts will make an impact on the daily lives of local communities. The impression Landpower makes upon multinational forces, local leaders, and other government agencies can produce lasting benefits.<sup>86</sup> However, Landpower alone cannot achieve U.S. national interests and will rely on the efforts of interagency partners in the other instruments of national power to make such a goal possible.

Landpower's efforts will require diplomatic assistance in the areas of negotiations, partnership and consensus building to help make the U.S. the partner of choice over China. Diplomatic efforts must focus on common interests and concentrate on those strategic relationships that matter most. Additionally, more frequent senior leader visits at the national level will send the right message from an informational perspective that the region and its people do matter to the United States. Furthermore, as economic conditions improve, the U.S. must open its aperture on foreign aid and

economic development initiatives in the region to help improve poverty conditions. Lastly, from a budgetary viewpoint, policymakers must provide the SOUTHCOM Commander the monetary resources needed to conduct the different types of engagements required in a sustained manner. GEN John Kelly, the SOUTHCOM Commander, eloquently conveyed this concern during his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee as follows:

If we want to maintain our partnerships in this hemisphere and maintain even minimal influence, we must remain engaged with this hemisphere. The cumulative effect of our reduced engagement is a relative but accelerated decline of trust in our reliability and commitment to the region. Our relationships, our leadership, and our influence in the Western Hemisphere will pay the price.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusion

Indications of declining U.S. influence in the Latin American Caribbean region have clearly manifested itself across all dimensions of the strategic environment. China has taken notice of this decline and has employed its own measures to advance its national interests in a region that by proximity alone is of great strategic importance to the United States. In a region whose principal military force are armies, the U.S. does have options at its disposal to rejuvenate U.S. influence. Militarily, the best option is Strategic Landpower.

The employment of Strategic Landpower as a means of military soft power can help to demonstrate U.S. commitment, support the establishment of enduring relationships with regional military and political leaders, improve capability of hosts to handle their own internal security challenges, and increase willingness of hosts to participate in friendly coalitions, and reduce the chances of experiencing strategic surprise.<sup>88</sup> Continued implementation of existing security cooperation and engagement

activities along with effective use strategic communications and new concepts such as RAFs and “light footprint” approach will better position the U.S. to protect its interests and improve its clout in the region. Furthermore, any effort the U.S. decides to undertake with Strategic Landpower must have a lasting effect that promotes self-reliance amongst the region’s people. If resourced properly, Strategic Landpower as part of a whole of government approach can make a difference in negating the rising influence of China in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Failure to counter China’s growing influence within this region will place the U.S. at an unnecessary disadvantage and expose it to risks that have not fully taken shape yet. An adversarial China, if conflict were to occur in the Pacific, can create challenges for the U.S. if it were allowed to gain a strategic foothold in the Western Hemisphere. China can only become preeminent if the United States continues to allow its own powers of attraction to atrophy.<sup>89</sup> Strategic Landpower can serve as that conduit to improve and rebuild this necessary attraction.

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