

Testimony Before U.S.- China Economic & Security
Review Commission on China's Role as 'Responsible Stakeholder'

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I appreciate the opportunity to offer my analysis before the Commissioners this morning on China's evolving role in Latin America. These are personal views, not those of the National War College or National Defense University. If it pleases the Commissioners, I ask to enter into the record a paper I presented on this topic at the Institute for National Strategic Studies' June 2006 symposium on China in the international community. The paper considered many of the same broad issues the Commission is pursuing but will allow me to focus my remarks directly on the questions the Commission asked in the letter of invitation to this hearing. My research on the topic has provided me with several important overall assessments of China's interest in Latin America that need be stated up front. First, I do not believe China **currently** poses a significant strategic threat to the United States in Latin America. Most important to the Chinese is their relationship with the United States which they would not jeopardize through strengthening their ties to regional governments at the expense of ties to Washington. Second, I believe the Chinese are acting as any great power would act: I do not find their actions uniquely Chinese nor are they surprising. The Chinese leadership of any regime would assert that they have global interests to include Latin America. Third, I believe that the opening for China results from the poor state of U.S.-Latin American relations as much as anything Beijing itself has done. Please note that in this assessment I will try giving a view from the Latin American perspective about the issues, not merely from Washington.

Chinese actions in Latin America indicate that Beijing **seeks to portray itself** as a benevolent, welcome 'newcomer' to the Latin American scene. The People's Republic of China established relations with the overwhelming majority of states in the region between 1970 and 1985, with Cuba a notable, early exception to that timeline. The November 2004 Hu Jintao visit, which I have compared elsewhere to a 'rock star' tour of the region, is only one of a series of diplomatic visits highly touted as opportunities for the region to get to know Chinese leadership and visa-versa. Chinese leaders have visited the major capitals of South America and Mexico occasionally since 2000 but not as often as they have been in

the capitals of Asia. These meetings, along with similar reciprocals in Beijing, do not seem out of the ordinary for a state which considers itself a growing power on the world diplomatic scene.

On the question of Taiwan, Beijing has been restrained in its behavior as it has taken limited steps to reverse the diplomatic relations existing between Paraguay and the five Central American nations and Taipei. Beijing has made it clear it would not tolerate states seeking either to have dual recognition or switch diplomatic recognition back to Taipei but I am not aware of cases of that occurring. States in the region have predominantly chosen to accept Beijing as the sole government of China, based on Latin America's strong tradition of common understanding of international legal norms. The Latin American states have also recognized Beijing because they see it in their national interests to do so. Central American states and Paraguay retain their fifty year old recognition of Taiwan because Beijing has not yet offered them a better deal. While there are some trade reasons for Taiwan's ties with these states, especially Panama, these ties are not likely to appear compelling to these states' governments over the long term if Beijing offers significant assistance and trade incentives. Taiwan, in short, is in a deteriorating position in this region as is true elsewhere around the world.

The security implications of Beijing's growing diplomatic presence do not seem dire to Latin American states, because the United States appears **to them** not all that interested in the region. The message that Latin American states have received in the post-911 years is that the United States puts its resources against known or anticipated terrorist threats, a condition lacking for the most part in this region. Proclamations of shared inter-American visions of democracy or free trade appear hollow to Latin Americans, even in light of the free trade agreement with Chile (signed in 2003) or NAFTA with Mexico over a decade ago. The concerns that Latin America has with Venezuela are far less than those of Washington, even though the Latins share the turf with Caracas. While enhanced military and economic connections between Caracas and Beijing are noted in Latin American capitals, few in the region find Chávez Frías the danger that Washington does, despite his growing confrontational style and consolidation of power around himself. Furthermore, the April 2002 coup attempt against him left Washington, and not the Venezuelan leader, seen as the spoiler in the region.

Washington has concerns about Castro enhancing ties with Beijing but the Chinese are guarded in their approach to an aging dictator with no clear succession line in place. One thing that causes Beijing great discomfort is uncertainty, and few places in the region offer more of that in the future than does Cuba. There are military-to-military ties between the PRC and Latin American states but this is more because of the weakness of their ties with Washington than because these states seek to open their military establishments to the Chinese. Latin American militaries have attended People's Liberation Army educational facilities at times in the past when they could not attend those in the United States. The Article 98

issues (restricting ties with states not accepting U.S. objections to the International Court jurisdiction over U.S. forces) remains a bitter pill for the region.

The greatest way to neutralize Beijing's involvement in this region would be to improve U.S. ties with the area. Increased serious emphasis on a free trade pact for the whole of the Americas would be a first step. Seriously discussing United Nations reform to allow a permanent Latin American seat, probably Brazil but possibly Chile, on the Security Council would make a tremendous difference to these bilateral ties. Simply lowering the rhetoric about illegal immigration across the Mexican border would signal a genuine U.S. commitment to the region that feels increasingly that it's been ignored, abused, and taken advantage of by the United States. Turning to Beijing for solace should not surprise us but could be turned around now, before something significantly more permanent and sustaining could develop. Beijing is likely going to continue and strengthen its role in the region so that in the longer run the Chinese may become more important, but they are currently a peripheral concern for the Latin Americans.

Thank you for your time and I welcome your questions and comments.