

Shifts in Global Dynamics and Relationships Within Latin America and the Caribbean:

The Power of Vaccine Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have been in crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Much needed vaccines have been sent and continue to be sent to LAC from many countries either through donations or contracted sales. The U.S., China, and Russia have been primary players in vaccine distribution in LAC. This paper explores diplomatic affects of U.S., Chinese, and Russian vaccine distribution in LAC as it seeks to identify shifts in global dynamics and relationships in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been in crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to recent Johns Hopkins University data, Latin America and the Caribbean combined have suffered more COVID-19 related deaths per capita than the U.S. and Canada combined. At the time of writing this article, Peru has the highest death rate in the world. As of August 2021, Brazil has seen the second-highest number of COVID related deaths, after the U.S., with more than half a million deaths so far. Mexico, Peru, and Colombia also rank among the top ten in the world for COVID related deaths.¹

While LAC countries only represent about 8% of the world's population, they have had almost a third of the world's COVID-19 related deaths.² Many LAC countries had weak healthcare systems even before the pandemic and COVID-19 has been a serious challenge for them. LAC countries have been in desperate need of any help they could get.

Though LAC is far from out of this pandemic, many state and non-state organizations quickly came to their aid in many forms, whether with donations or willingness to contract sales. The U.S., China, and Russia were all involved with vaccine distribution in LAC. With that came aspects of vaccine diplomacy from all countries involved. Vaccine distribution in LAC has been complicated. The 6 largest countries in LAC received vaccines from at least five different companies. Mexico contracted with 10 different companies.³ There has been a

1. Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, "Mortality Analysis," Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, last modified August 28, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

2. See note 1.

3. Luisa Horwitz and Carin Zissis, "Timeline: Tracking Latin America's Road to Vaccination," Americas Society/Council of the Americas, last modified August 23, 2021, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/timeline-tracking-latin-americas-road-vaccination>

steady flow of announcements coming from LAC countries concerning new vaccine authorizations, contracts, donations, and shipment reception as countries are constantly fighting to get supplies through whatever pipeline they can find.

In order to understand the role vaccine diplomacy has played in LAC, and could potentially play in the future, it is important to analyze the details and timeline of U.S, Chinese, and Russian vaccine distribution. All of these countries are still under-vaccinated so these dynamics will continue to play out for at least the near future. This paper seeks to shine a light on vaccine distribution related events in LAC from the start of the pandemic until August 2021 as well as spark a conversation about what some of these events could potentially mean for U.S, Chinese, and Russian relations in the region. Ultimately, this paper seeks to identify shifts in global dynamics and relationships within LAC due to vaccine diplomacy.

PANDEMIC AID TO LAC PRIOR TO VACCINE AVAILABILITY

The U.S strategy at the early stages of the pandemic was to first attend to the needs of their own population. As stated by White House Press Secretary, Jen Psaki, “The administration’s focus is on ensuring that every American is vaccinated, and once we accomplish that objective we’re happy to discuss further steps beyond that.”⁴ Since the 1950s the US has been a major donor to LAC. Because of that, the U.S. delay to send aid to LAC was not typical. The devastating effects of the pandemic erased every kind of normalcy around the world, and this was just another example of it. Although the relationship between the U.S. and some LAC countries had become more strained in the few years prior to the

4. Jen Psaki and Alejandro Mayorkas, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas,” The White House, March 1, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/03/01/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-secretary-of-homeland-security-alejandro-mayorkas/>

pandemic as the U.S reduced funding to some Central American countries as a strategy to reduce illegal migrants, the U.S. struggle to manage its own public health crisis was a scenario completely apart from prior U.S. politics in the region.

In the early stages of the pandemic, while the U.S. delayed aid to LAC in order to focus on the crisis in their own country, China quickly seized upon the opportunity to fill that need. As early as February 2020, China began providing medical-related donations to Latin America. According to a study by Telias & Urdinez, between February and June 2020 China sent \$128 million of donations to the region.⁵ For some it may have seemed like Beijing was coming to their rescue while the U.S. focus was on themselves. Senior Honduran official, Carlos Alberto Madero, demonstrated that sentiment when he said, “The Honduran people start to see that China is helping its allies and we start to ask ourselves why ours are not helping us.”⁶

In July 2020, leaders from Argentina, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay met in a meeting with China’s foreign Affairs Minister.⁷ China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, stated that the meeting was to “consolidate consensus between

5. Diego Telias and Francisco Urdinez, “China’s Foreign Aid Political Drivers: Lessons from a Novel Dataset of Mask Diplomacy in Latin America During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, forthcoming 2020, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344035590>

6. Michael Stott, Kathrine Hille and Demetri Sevastopulo, “U.S. to send vaccines to Latin America after Taiwan ally warns of pivot to China,” *Financial Times*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/c0717932-0d88-4cea-b55c-ff561ed1f70e>

7. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México, “Joint Statement of the Special Video Conference of China and Latin American and Caribbean Countries’ Foreign Ministers on COVID-19,” Gobierno de México, July 22, 2020, <https://mision.sre.gob.mx/oea/index.php/comunicados/35-comunicados-2020/709-videoconferencia-especial-entre-cancilleres-de-china-y-de-america-latina-y-el-caribe-para-atencion-de-la-pandemia-por-covid-19-22-jul-20>

the two sides on jointly fighting the pandemic, cement political mutual trust, uphold multilateralism, build with concrete steps a community with a shared future for China and Latin American and Caribbean countries.”⁸ In this meeting China offered a \$1 billion dollar loan, accessible to LAC countries, for vaccine purchases.⁹ This offer is in-line with China’s past interactions in LAC. China has already been loaning billions of dollars to LAC over the last decade as part of their Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁰

FIRST LAC COVID-19 VACCINE DELIVERIES AND INOCULATIONS

Though vaccine clinical trials had been happening in LAC since June 2020, the first official COVID-19 inoculations in LAC took place on Christmas Eve, 2020 in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Chile.¹¹ All three of these countries used vaccines purchased from Pfizer shipped in directly from their production plant in Belgium.¹² A few days later Argentina administered

8. Wang Wenbin, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on July 22, 2020,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, July 22, 2020, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t1799871.htm>

9. See note 7.

10. Pepe Zhang, “Belt and Road in Latin America: A Regional Game Changer,” Atlantic Council, October 8, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/belt-and-road-in-latin-america-a-regional-game-changer/>

11. See note 3.

12. Ministerio de Salud de Chile, “Presidente Piñera Recibe Primer Cargamento de Vacunas Contra el COVID-19: “Son Una Luz de Esperanza”,” December 24, 2020, <https://www.minsal.cl/presidente-pinera-recibe-primer-cargamento-de-vacunas-contra-el-covid-19-son-una-luz-de-esperanza/>

Presidencia de la República de Costa Rica, “Llegó al país Primer Lote de Vacunas Contra COVID-19,” Costa Rica, December 23, 2020, <https://www.presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2020/12/llego-al-pais-primer-lote-de-vacunas-contra-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1QXEFZn136Zgg0VqsB21ZEDFcJGg38Z3R2rXXfUhnWcUU-fEEKFN4Kg>

Secretaría de Salud de México, “México Recibe Primer Embarque de Vacunas Pfizer-BioNTech Contra el Virus SARS-CoV-2,” Gobierno de México, December 23, 2020,

their first inoculations using the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.¹³ In January and February some of the largest countries in Latin America began vaccinating their people. Brazil's first vaccination was with China's Sinovac vaccine.¹⁴ Peru used China's Sinopharm.¹⁵ Colombia used Pfizer.¹⁶ Venezuela used the Russian Sputnik V.¹⁷

COVAX INITIATIVE IN LAC

Another important part in LAC vaccine distribution is the World Health Organization (WHO) program, COVAX. Starting in March 2021, COVAX started sending vaccines to eligible LAC countries.¹⁸ That same month the U.S. committed \$4 billion towards COVAX, more than any other country.¹⁹ COVAX is a global collaboration to accelerate the

<https://www.gob.mx/salud/prensa/mexico-recibe-primer-embarque-de-vacunas-pfizer-biontech-contr-el-virus-sars-cov-2-260177?idiom=es>

13. See note 3.

14. *BBC*, "Covid: Brazil approves and rolls out AstraZeneca and Sinovac Vaccines," January 18, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-55699535>

15. Ministerio de Salud de Perú, "Primer Lote de Vacunas Sinopharm Contra la COVID 19 Legaría el 9 de Febrero," Gob.pe, January 29, 2021, <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/minsa/noticias/340183-primer-lote-de-vacunas-sinopharm-contr-la-covid-19-llegaria-el-9-de-febrero>

16. Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social de Colombia, "La Llegada de las Primeras Vacunas en una Esperanza: Pfizer," February 15, 2021, <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/Paginas/La-llegada-de-las-primeras-vacunas-en-una-esperanza-Pfizer.aspx>

17. Nicolás Maduro (@NicolasMaduro), "Glendy Rivero, una joven médica del estado Miranda fue la primera venezolana en vacunarse con la Sputnik V..." Twitter, February 18, 2021, <https://twitter.com/nicolasmaduro/status/1362508237086593034?lang=en>

18. See note 3.

19. The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Biden to Take Action on Global Health through Support of COVAX and Calling for Health Security Financing," February 18, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/18/fact-sheet-president-biden-to-take-action-on-global-health-through-support-of-covax-and-calling-for-health-security-financing/>

development and production of COVID vaccine and create fair and equitable access to COVID vaccines in every country.²⁰

By design of its mission, COVAX deemphasizes the identity of its donors which has suppressed the region's understanding of the US's role in the 215 million doses already distributed globally as of August 2021.²¹ Though China has recently pledged to donate to COVAX, China has not yet made contributions.²² Instead, COVAX, which is primarily funded through donations, has bought vaccines from China for distribution throughout the world.²³

U.S., CHINESE VACCINE DISTRIBUTION METHODS COMPARED

Though the U.S. provided more funding to COVAX than any other country, their role in LAC vaccine donations is not emphasized, especially when vaccines distributed by COVAX may sometimes be Chinese products. U.S. based company, Pfizer, has contracted 213.2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine sales in LAC, more than any other U.S. company. Their deliveries, however, are flown in directly from its production plant in Belgium, further demphasizing the U.S.'s place, even from the private sector, in global vaccine distribution.²⁴

20. World Health Organization, "COVAX," accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>

21. Gavi, "COVAX Vaccine Roll-out," Last modified August 24, 2021, <https://www.gavi.org/covax-vaccine-roll-out>

22. Huizhong Wu, "China Pledges 2 Billion Vaccines Globally Though Year's End," *AP*, August 6, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-health-china-coronavirus-pandemic-7b3a7e0f5949b6976d4cf7f69bba71d0>

23. Julia Hollingsworth, "COVAX Signs Deal for 550 Million Chinese COVID-19 Vaccines Amid Questions Over Efficacy," *CNN*, July 13, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/13/asia/covax-china-vaccines-intl-hnk/index.html>

24. See note 3.

In contrast, when a contracted Chinese shipment is received, it is flown in on a plane directly from China. Vaccines are unloaded in crates printed with Chinese writing. Chinese vaccine delivery has been designed for photo ops. Additionally, China has tried portraying themselves in social media and state media as coming to LAC's aid, regardless of the fact that most vaccines they have delivered to the region were sold, not donated.²⁵ At this point it is not possible to know to what extent this impression has affected LAC views on China versus the United States, but it is valuable to recognize the difference.

VACCINE DEPLOYMENT TO LAC MARCH TO AUGUST 2021

During the first few months after the start of inoculations in LAC, the U.S. faced much criticism from both LAC governments and the media for not contributing enough vaccines to the region. Finally, in March 2021 the U.S. announced plans to send 2.5 million vaccines to Mexico, its first direct donation to a LAC country.²⁶ Later, in May 2021, President Biden announced that the U.S. would donate 80 million vaccines for global use.²⁷

U.S. global vaccine donations started to dramatically take off in June 2021. From June until August 2021 there has been a constant flow of announcements from the U.S. Department of State of either plans to send vaccines or reported safe deliveries of vaccines to LAC. Throughout the months of June, July and August 2021 the US has reported donations

25. R. Evan Ellis, "Vaccine Diplomacy in Latin America, Caribbean a PR Coup for China," *National Defense* 106, no. 812 (2021): 35-36.

26. Jen Psaki and Marcia L. Fudge, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia L. Fudge, March 18, 2021," The White House, March 18, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/03/18/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-secretary-of-housing-and-urban-development-marcia-l-fudge-march-18-2021/>

27. The White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Allocation Plan for 55 Million Doses to be Shared Globally," June 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/21/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-allocation-plan-for-55-million-doses-to-be-shared-globally/>

of millions of vaccine doses to 15 Latin American countries and all countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).²⁸ The U.S. has also announced plans to continue to donate vaccines to LAC throughout the latter half of 2021 and first half of 2022.²⁹

As of Aug 2021, Chinese companies have contracted 358.85 million doses to Latin America. Russia has contracted 185.8 million doses with Latin America for the Sputnik V vaccine. U.S. companies have contracted 544.6 million doses to the region. European company Oxford-AstraZeneca has contracted 360.04 million doses. Looking purely at vaccine doses contracted to be delivered to LAC countries, 37% are from U.S. companies, 25% from Chinese companies, another 25% from the European company Oxford-AstraZeneca, and 13% for Russia's Sputnik V.³⁰

VACCINE DIPLOMACY

Vaccine diplomacy is the use of vaccines to improve a country's diplomatic relations and influence in other countries. Though countries might not admit to it, vaccine diplomacy is obviously some type of a driving force when it comes to vaccine distribution. Vaccine donations or sales to a particular region may come with hope for trade aspirations in the future. It may be done to smooth over poor diplomatic relationships. It may be used to sway a country's actions in the donor's favor.

Though more U.S. companies contract vaccine sales in the region than China or Russia, there is need to be concerned about what role these sales have had to shift relations in

28. U.S. Department of State, "*COVID-19 Vaccine Donations*," Accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha>

29. Pfizer, "Pfizer and BioNTech to Provide 500 Million Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine to U.S. Government for Donation to Poorest Nations," June 10, 2021, <https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/pfizer-and-biontech-provide-500-million-doses-covid-19>

30. See note 3.

the region.³¹ Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson, all privately owned companies, do not have the type of political interests as state-owned companies like China's Sinovac or Sinopharm. Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V, is also produced by a government controlled research facility.

CHINESE VACCINE DIPLOMACY

An example of the great power China has during this pandemic, because they have vaccines they are able to distribute globally, is their ability to sell and possibly influence decisions in Brazil despite many Brazilian leaders being highly critical of China. Throughout the pandemic, rhetoric from Brazilian leaders has shown mistrust towards China. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has speculated that the pandemic might be the result of "biological warfare" from China.³² His son, Brazilian federal lawmaker and top foreign policy advisor, Eduardo Bolsonaro, has tweeted that the coronavirus is "China's fault".³³ Brazilian Education Minister, Abraham Weintraub, tweeted suggesting that the coronavirus is part of China's "plan for world domination."³⁴ Former Brazilian foreign affairs minister, Ernesto Araújo, has referred to it as the "comunavirus".³⁵

31. See note 3.

32. *AFP*, "Brazil's Bolsonaro Links Pandemic to 'Germ Warfare'," *France 24*, May 5, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210505-brazil-s-bolsonaro-links-pandemic-to-germ-warfare>

33. Eduardo Bolsonaro (@BolsonaroSP), "Quem assistiu Chernobyl vai entender o q ocorreu. Substitua a usina nuclear pelo coronavírus e a ditadura soviética pelo chinesa..." Twitter, March 18, 2020, <https://twitter.com/BolsonaroSP/status/1240286560953815040>

34. *AFP*, "Brazil Minister Offends China with 'Racist' Virus Tweets," *France 24*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200406-brazil-minister-offends-china-with-racist-virus-tweet>

35. Ernesto Araújo, "Chegou o Comunavírus," *Metapolítica 17* (blog), April 21, 2020, <https://www.metapoliticabrasil.com/post/chegou-o-comunavírus>

Despite Brazil's top officials' views on China, Brazil purchased 160 million doses of vaccine from China.³⁶ Though Brazil may be one of the LAC countries least willing to politically embrace China, the country was still able to leave their mark in Brazil and get their foot in the door with the vaccine, possibly opening room for future contracts. The most notable impact vaccine diplomacy in Brazil has had for China is Brazil's reversal of a prior decision to exclude the Chinese company, Huawei, from their 5G network soon after making agreements with China to purchase vaccines.³⁷

Additionally, the Dominican Republic has also reversed a prior decision that banned Huawei from building their 5G network.³⁸ Less than two weeks after announcing that Huawei would not be excluded from consideration, they received their first vaccine shipment from China.³⁹ Brazil and the Dominican Republic's decisions could have strategic repercussions for the U.S. since inclusion of Chinese 5G network telecommunications equipment in these countries would make it more difficult for the U.S to provide sensitive intelligence and other information to these LAC partners.⁴⁰

Telias and Urdinez studied mask donations from China to LAC countries during the pandemic. They found that mask donations from China were 70% smaller in LAC countries with diplomatic ties to Taiwan. The lack of donations to countries that maintained diplomatic

36. See note 3.

37. Ernesto Londoño and Leticia Casado, "Brazil Needs Vaccines, and China is Benefiting," *New York Times*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/world/brazil-needs-vaccines-and-china-is-benefiting.html>

38. *Loop News*, "Huawei to be Included in Dom Rep 5G Network Auction," February 15, 2021, <https://caribbean.loopnews.com/content/huawei-be-included-dom-rep-5g-network-auction-2>

39. *Xinhua*, "Dominican Republic Receives China's Sinovac Vaccine," February 24, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/24/c_139763671.htm

40. See note 25.

relations with Taiwan suggests an agenda.⁴¹ In March 2021, unofficial brokers with access to Chinese vaccines offered a deal to Paraguay. They tried to persuade Paraguay to abandon its longtime ally, Taiwan, and diplomatically recognize China in exchange for millions of vaccine doses. Though the Chinese government denies connection to these brokers, others argue that it is unlikely anyone else would have access to this amount of Chinese vaccine to make this offer.⁴²

In February 2021, Guyana agreed to let Taiwan set up a trade office in their country. China responded demanded that they “avoid setting up any official institutions” and to correct their “mistake.”⁴³ Just 24 hours later the deal was called off.⁴⁴ Less than a month later Guyana received a vaccine shipment donated China.⁴⁵ Though there have been no official statements on to why the trade office deal with Taiwan was canceled, it is possible that vaccine diplomacy played at least some role.

In March, 2021, Honduras publicly committed to the possibility of opening a trade office in China as they sought to acquire COVID-19 vaccines. Unlike Guyana, they made it clear why Honduras, a country who recognizes Taiwan as a sovereign state, would choose this action. President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, stated, “to buy the Chinese

41. See note 5.

42. *BBC*, “Taiwan accuses China of ‘vaccine diplomacy’ in Paraguay,” April 7, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56661303>.

43. AP, “Taiwan Opens Trade Office in Guyana in Diplomatic Win,” February 4, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/global-trade-south-america-china-guyana-taiwan-3c44aa6708353f3b12846e971a462f30>

44. AP, “Taiwan Says Trade Office With Guyana is Now Off, Blaming China,” February 5, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/global-trade-south-america-china-guyana-asia-pacific-05b5d78db7a08fc5baba983b39d5463f>

45. *Xinhua*, “Guyana Receives Donated COVID-19 Vaccines From China,” March 3, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/03/c_139780346_2.htm

vaccine we have to look for a diplomatic bridge.⁴⁶ This action by Honduras could be a step in the direction of changing their recognition of Taiwan.

Finally, if any LAC country chooses to accept the \$1 billion loan offer for vaccine purchases made by China in July 2020, they will become indebted to China.⁴⁷ Many LAC countries are already indebted to China and furthering that debt would only strengthen China's influence in the region.⁴⁸ Further dependency on China would ensure LAC's continued support for plans like the Belt and Road Initiative.

RUSSIAN VACCINE DIPLOMACY

Russia has had mixed results in vaccine diplomacy in LAC. Russia has made positive shifts in building a relationship with Mexico. In January 2021, while the U.S. still was not sending donations to other countries, Mexico contracted to purchase Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. As one of the more populated countries in LAC, Mexico has struggled to get enough vaccines and the opportunity to purchase vaccines from Russia was welcomed. Soon after contracting, Mexico's president, Andres Manuel, invited Russian president, Vladimir Putin to visit.⁴⁹ It is significant that at that point President Biden had not yet received any invitation to visit from Mexico since taking office. Still, as of July 3, 2021, Mexico only received 4.1

46. Presidencia de la República de Honduras. "Honduras Considera Abrir Oficina Comercial en China." Gobierno de la República de Honduras, May 12, 2021. <https://presidencia.gob.hn/index.php/gob/el-presidente/9477-honduras-considera-abrir-oficina-comercial-en-china>

47. See note 7.

48. Margaret Myers, "China-Latin America Commercial Loans Tracker," Inter-American Dialogue, last modified 2021, https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/

49. Andrés Manuel (@lopezobrador_), "Conversamos con el presidente de la Federación Rusa, Vladimir Putin, y se mostró genuinamente afectuoso. Lo invité a visitar México..." Twitter, January 25, 2020, https://twitter.com/lopezobrador_/status/1353732942904709123

million of the 24 million doses contracted.⁵⁰ This has been a global trend. Russia has gotten behind in vaccine manufacturing. If Russia cannot deliver when needed, what gains in diplomacy they have made may not last.

Argentina's president, Alberto Fernandez, initially responded to Russia's distribution of the Sputnik V vaccine in his country by publicly thanking Putin.⁵¹ Sputnik V was the first vaccine Argentina was able to obtain. Though Argentina started negotiations with Pfizer early, the ability to come to an agreement for purchase was easier and much quicker with Russia than it was with Pfizer.⁵² After contracting sales with Argentina, Russia soon fell behind in production and has not been able to deliver all that was agreed on. In July 2021, Argentinian presidential advisor Cecilia Nicolini wrote an email to the CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund stating that "the entire contract is at risk of being canceled." At that point Russia owed Argentina more than 18 million doses of vaccine.⁵³ August, 2021 Argentinian Health Minister, Carla Vizzotti, and Nicolini personally traveled in Russia to discuss vaccine production.⁵⁴

50. Alejandro Cano, "¿Cómo Va el Avance en la Aplicación de Vacunas Contra Covid-19 en México? Corte al 3 de Julio de 2021," *Nexos*, July 5, 2021, <https://datos.nexos.com.mx/como-va-el-avance-en-la-aplicacion-de-vacunas-contra-covid-19-en-mexico-corte-al-3-de-julio-de-2021/>

51. Alberto Fernández (@alferdez), "Argentina ya tiene vacuna contra el Covid-19. Nuestra sincera gratitud con @sputnikvaccine y con el presidente Vladmir Putin por el compromiso que han demostrado con nuestro país..." Twitter, December 24, 2020, <https://twitter.com/alferdez/status/1342171742937239559?lang=en>

52. Stefano Pozzebon, "How Russian Vaccine Sputnik V Spread Through Latin America," *CNN*, February 17, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/17/americas/russia-putin-sputnik-vaccine-latin-america-intl/index.html>

53. Carlos Pagini, "La Carta a Rusia que Revela la Encrucijada del Gobierno por la Falta de Vacunas," *La Nacion*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/la-revelacion-de-la-encrucijada-mas-desesperante-del-gobierno-nid22072021/>

54. *TASS*, "Argentinian Health Minister Sets Off for Moscow to Discuss Sputnik V Supplies," August 16, 2021, <https://tass.com/world/1326705>

Russian distribution of Sputnik V seemed to initially be received favorably by Bolivia's leadership as well and may have produced some developing shifts in their favor. Soon after Russia contracted 5.2 million doses of vaccine to Bolivia, their president, Luis Arce, was on the phone with Putin discussing reviving Russian investments in Bolivia. Topics included building a nuclear power plant, lithium mining, and gas reserves.⁵⁵ More recently, in August 2021, those conversations have continued. The Kremlin reported that Arce's and Putin's August phone call discussed, "cooperation in combating the coronavirus infection" as well as Russian-Bolivian cooperation in trade, energy, and humanitarian exchanges.⁵⁶ Still, as of June 2021, Bolivia has only received 750,000 doses of Sputnik V of the 5.2 million that were originally contracted.⁵⁷

Russian vaccine diplomacy has helped Russia smooth over relationships with Colombia, who had chosen to expel two Russian officials just three months prior to Russia and Colombia making a vaccine deal. According to Leonid Sboiko, first secretary at the Russian Embassy in Colombia, "Cooperating on the vaccines is the most pressing issue right now, and is going to positively influence [Colombia and Russia's] bilateral relationship." This decision surprised some since Colombia is one of America's closest allies in the region and members of Colombia's right-wing party, Democratic Center, have criticized Russia's

55. Aislinn Laing and Cassandra Garrison, "Amid Scramble for COVID-19 vaccine, Latin America turns to Russia," *Reuters*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/amid-scramble-covid-19-vaccine-latin-america-turns-russia-2021-03-01/>

56. *TASS*, "Putin, Bolivian President Discuss Cooperation in Combating Coronavirus Pandemic," August 3, 2021, <https://tass.com/society/1322311>

57. Carlos Valdez, "Ante Demora de la Sputnik V, Rusia envía antiviral a Bolivia," *AP*, June 14, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/noticias-1bd609aed07d1a40cc7785dfb57f03c8>

involvement in Latin America in the past. Colombia's president, Iván Duque, is a member of the Democratic Center Party.⁵⁸

Russian vaccine delays caused Guatemala to cancel their order in July 2021. The vaccine delay resulted in criticism of the Guatemalan government, a call for an investigation, and a demand for resignation of Guatemala's president, Alejandro Giammettei, from social, educational, and humanitarian organizations.⁵⁹ In Guatemala Russian vaccine diplomacy failed.

U.S. CONSIDERATIONS

Helping LAC combat COVID-19 is in the strategic interest of the U.S. Though vaccine diplomacy in the region may not have necessarily weakened the U.S.'s relationship with LAC, it has allowed for China, and to some extent Russia, to strengthen their influence. Widespread vaccine donations from the U.S. government that have taken place during the months of June, July, and August 2021 are a step in the right direction to prevent stronger Chinese and Russian influence in the region. There has already been complaints from LAC governments about the low efficiency of Chinese vaccines and the recent shortage of Russian vaccines is starting to cause disapproval among LAC customers. This is the time for the U.S. to let LAC know they are not forgotten.

First, U.S. global medical aid will help stop the virus from spreading and mutating, something that eventually could have devastating effects in the U.S. if not kept in check abroad. Also, the pandemic has and will continue to have socioeconomic effects in LAC. By helping these countries manage the disease, the U.S. is also helping the region towards economic recovery. This could potentially curb the amount of migrants trying to cross into

58. See note 48.

59. AFP, "Guatemala Cancels Order for Russian Vaccines," *France 24*, July 18, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210728-guatemala-cancels-order-for-russian-vaccines>

the United States to escape the affects of an economic crisis. As LAC countries try to recover, the U.S. can play an important role in aiding in that recovery. Aiding LAC to rebuild their economy will help rebuild alliances.

The U.S. must also do more to spread awareness of its efforts and push back against narratives saying that they had neglected LAC. One way that could be done is by increasing the presence of U.S. personnel at vaccine distribution sites. That would send a stronger message that it is the U.S. who is sharing this vaccine. By creating a clear and honest narrative of U.S. aid to the region, the U.S. will strengthen ties that are important to keep strong with their hemispheric neighbors.

Recent election results in some LAC countries have made some political analysts question if LAC is starting to slide into a new “Pink Tide”. The Pink Tide refers to the LAC turn towards left-wing governments during the start of the 21st century accompanied by ideological trends that were at times anti-American, populist, and authoritarian leaning. A new Pink Tide would surely have support from Russia and China, and it would not be in U.S. interest. It is important for the U.S. to continue to maintain strong relationships within the region. Though sharing vaccines is only part of the solution, it should not be ignored.

CONCLUSION

Vaccine diplomacy has clearly created shifts in some LAC countries in favor of China. Russia may have seen some benefits as well, though vaccine shortages have severely hampered their impact. This paper discusses observations made through what is available in government press releases and private and public media. At the time of writing this paper, August 2021, there is still more to be observed, more sales that will be made, and more unknown factors involving this global pandemic. With such an unknown future, it is important to recognize that vaccines indeed have the power to create shifts in relationships. The U.S. is a key player in the region and their role in providing aid has the power to cement

and strengthen their own relationships within the region, while China and Russia compete to do the same.

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