

China's 14th Five-Year Plan Reveals an Escalation of Great Power Competition

A Threat to the Security Environment in Latin America

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After decades of impressive economic growth and a long-term geostrategic vision, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has achieved very important goals during its past thirteen Five-Year Strategic plans. The policy of launching Five-Year Strategic plans began in 1952 after the foundation of the PRC. Every five years, the China Communist Party set the priorities and goals for the country for the following five years. In March 2021, the PRC released its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), reaffirming its strategy overseas. This latest plan reveals an escalation of Great Power Competition (GPC) and represents a threat to the security environment in Latin America. China's overseas strategy is eroding existing alliances between Latin American countries and the US. An examination of this strategy must be performed to reveal China's intent behind the economic seizing of Latin American countries and the goals behind the promotion of political agendas for its own benefit—it might be that China may not actually be the GPC the world claims it to be.

Recent Chinese investments indicate that China's policy to seize countries economically, represents a key factor in its strategy for Latin America. As of this writing, nineteen countries form part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), representing approximately one trillion dollars of investment in connectivity and infrastructure.¹ China's 14th Strategic Plan states that China's ultra-large-scale market is advantageous for international cooperation and win-win outcomes, in order to achieve stable and long-term development.² Moreover, the Plan also declares that China will promote the combination of military construction and regional economic development to better meet the demands of its national security development strategy.³ As China stimulates the development and the economy of the region, it gains the ability to exert influence over critical areas of its economy. The result is that nations in the region become, to a certain extent, dependent on China's interests.⁴ Of note, economic development drives political agendas in Latin America, as the promise of capital makes political decision makers easier to approach.

Currently, China's significant economic investments are provided in exchange of political support for Chinese interests. For example, in the last four years, three Latin American countries have cut ties with Taiwan and recognized the PRC, following the "One China" policy.⁵ This demonstrates that China understands Latin America's key role in this diplomatic battle, as most of the countries in the region still maintain relations with Taiwan. It's also important to draw attention to China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) role in this effort, through its military police deployments in support of United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti and deployment of its hospital ship into the region. Of note, China's 14th Strategic Plan calls for a new type of international relations, which advocates for a more just and reasonable system.⁶ This is in conflict with the US' Interim National Security Guidance, which calls for the US to "lead and sustain a stable and open international system, underwritten by strong alliances."⁷

Nevertheless, some scholars state that China is not a GPC actor yet, as it must first solve several substantial internal problems. Instead, they offer that China's investments are simply the result of a growing nation that's only trying to secure the resources needed for its national subsistence. Moreover, as George Friedman stated, the actual Chinese geopolitical reality is that China is an isolated country, with deep internal divisions. Its strategic priority, consequently, is to find internal stability.⁸ Furthermore, another reason offered supporting the premise that China's perception as a GPC is flawed, is that China was the first to suffer the impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Many have questioned its role in the root of the Pandemic within its territory, and thus, China has been subject to infamous negative status in the world. Indeed, several countries have confronted China with complaints about its poor handling of information about the virus, up to, at one point, opening the possibility of holding China accountable for the spread of COVID-19. This reflects serious flaws within China's institutions, at least in the international arena.

In summary, China's 14th Strategic Plan increases GPC and signifies a hazard to the security situation in Latin America. China's strategy damages existing alliances between Latin American countries and the US via its policy to economically "invade" countries in order to promote political agendas in favor of China's interests—not withstanding the counter argument that China may not actually be the GPC the world affirms it to be. It's important to analyze the political results China's achieving in support of its interests in Latin America via the economic policy its been implementing, in order to understand its overall strategy in the region. If the dynamic of this strategic competition is not changed, it could escalate into turning Latin America into the new battleground for the hegemonic struggle between the US and China. □

Notes

1. Ciara Nugent and Charlie Campell, "The US and China are Battling for Influence in Latin America, and the Pandemic Has Raised the Stakes," (TIME, Feb 4, 2021). [Time.com/5936037/us-china-latin-america-influence](https://time.com/5936037/us-china-latin-america-influence).
2. Ben Murphy, "Outline of the People's Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035," (Center for Security and Emerging Technology, May 12, 2021), 98.
3. Ibid., p 131.
4. Cristina de Esperanza, "China en America Latina: ¿El inicio de una nueva Guerra Fria?" ("China in Latin America: The beginning of a new Cold War?"), (elordenmundial.com, Mar 10, 2019). [Elordenmundial.com/china-enamerica-latina-el-inicio-de-una-nueva-guerra-fria/](https://elordenmundial.com/china-enamerica-latina-el-inicio-de-una-nueva-guerra-fria/).
5. Ciara Nugent and Charlie Campell, "The US and China are Battling for Influence in Latin America, and the Pandemic Has Raised the Stakes."
6. Ben Murphy, "Outline of the People's Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035," 102.
7. Joseph Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," (The White House, Mar 21), 9.
8. George Friedman, "China's Strategy," (Geopolitical Futures, Jan 11, 2016). www.geopoliticalfutures.com/chinas-strategy/.



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