

The Monroe Doctrine 2.0 and U.S.-China-Latin America Trilateral Relations¹

M.C. Pires, L.G. do Nascimento

Marcos Cordeiro Pires – PhD in Economic History from University of São Paulo (USP), Professor of the Faculty of Philosophy and Sciences of State University of São Paulo (Unesp), Butanta, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: marcos.cordeiro@unesp.br

Lucas Gualberto do Nascimento – Master Degree Candidate in Social Sciences, International Relations and Development, State University of São Paulo (Unesp), Research Fellow, Research Group on Geopolitics, Regional Integration, and World System, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Pedro Calmon, 550, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. E-mail: lucasgdn2@gmail.com

Abstract

The election of Donald Trump caused a change in the direction of U.S. foreign policy for Latin America with the imposition of new sanctions on the Cuban government (starting a new cold war with the island) and the attempted regime changes in Venezuela and Nicaragua, whose governments are seen as a threat by Washington's elite. In September 2018, during a speech at the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Donald Trump took up the principles of the Monroe Doctrine as a formal U.S. policy and rejected the alleged interference of foreign states in the western hemisphere and in the internal affairs of the United States — a direct allusion to China and Russia. This change in U.S. policy toward Latin America has had a great impact on Sino-Latin American relations in the context of political pressures and aggressive rhetoric seeking to curb the Chinese presence there. This article explores the motivation behind the new attitude of the United States in its relations with Latin America and how it impacts Sino-Latin American relations.

Key words: Monroe Doctrine; Latin America; US-Latin America relations; Sino-Latin America relations; US-China Trade War.

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Introduction

On 18 November 2013, then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, speaking at the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS), announced the end of the Monroe Doctrine. In theory, his statement ended a 190-year period in which the U.S. government took an assertive stance on Latin American destinies. Furthermore, former President Barack Obama, in a speech at the opening session of the 7th Summit of the Americas on 15 April 2015, heralded a new era in U.S.-Latin America relations, which would overcome ideological barriers of the past and create a new spirit of partnership based on mutual interest and respect. It should be noted that this meeting was the first at which Cuban leaders were in attendance after the resumption of diplomatic relations with Washington.

The election of Donald Trump caused a change in the foreign policy direction for Latin America, notably by imposing new sanctions on the Cuban government (starting a new cold war

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with the island) and attempting regime change in Venezuela and Nicaragua, whose governments were seen as a threat by Washington's elite. In addition, in a speech at the University of Texas on 1 February 2018, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recalled the principles of the Monroe Doctrine to warn Latin America against Chinese influence, arguing that "Latin America does not need new imperial powers that seek only to benefit their own people" [Reuters, 2018]. In September 2018, during a speech at the opening session of the UN General Assembly in New York, Donald Trump took up the principles of the Monroe Doctrine as a formal U.S. policy and rejected the alleged interference of foreign states in the western hemisphere and in the internal affairs of his country. In his words, "it has been the formal policy of our country since President Monroe that we reject the interference of foreign nations in this hemisphere" [Newman, 2019]. This was a direct allusion to China and Russia.²

This change in U.S. policy has been marked by political pressures and aggressive rhetoric seeking to contain the Chinese presence, in contrast to policies adopted during the governments of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, who, in principle, did not see Chinese economic involvement in the region as conflicting with their priorities. The resurgence of hegemonic disputes, resembling the Cold War, is motivating concerns in Washington about China's presence in Latin America. This has brought back a refurbished Monroe Doctrine 2.0 directed against Chinese and Russian interests in the region.

This article aims to understand the motivation behind the new attitude of the United States in its relations with Latin America, and how this attitude tends to impact Sino-Latin American relations. To this end, the article briefly discusses the historical application of the Monroe Doctrine in U.S. relations with Latin America, explores the evolution of Sino-U.S. policies toward Latin America, and analyzes the context of disputes between China, Russia and the United States in Latin America amid a political, commercial and technological dispute between powers.

The Monroe Doctrine and Latin America

The Monroe Doctrine bears the name of U.S. President James Monroe who, in 1823, formulated U.S. foreign policy concerning the newly independent states in Hispanic and Portuguese America, and possible threats to their sovereignty coming from European powers. The three main principles of the Monroe Doctrine are: the definition of spheres of influence between the Americas and Europe; non-colonization of already independent areas; and non-intervention of

² Trump's former national security advisor, John Bolton, expressed the same ideas during a speech in April 2019: "Today we proudly proclaim for all to hear: the Monroe Doctrine is alive and well," said Bolton during a ceremony to Cuban Bay of Pigs veterans [Newman, 2019].

European powers in American affairs [U.S. Department of State Archive, 2001]. Although at the time it had no military means to enforce these principles, the United States government relied on the tacit support of Great Britain to ensure the sovereignty of states on the American continent and to protect unfolding independence processes which were strongly supported by the British.

As the United States developed, its power to intervene in Latin America grew significantly, enabling victory over Mexico in successive wars between 1846–48. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Roosevelt Corollary, also known as the “big stick policy,” permitted the use of force to secure U.S. interests in Latin America, as occurred in Cuba (1906–10), Nicaragua (1909–11, 1912–25 and 1926–33), Haiti (1915–34), and the Dominican Republic (1916–24). In addition to the policy of intervention, the United States undertook dollar diplomacy — supposedly replacing bullets for dollars — which aimed to support the expansion of U.S. financial capital to Latin America and establish a dependency of the region on the United States. The imposition of Panamanian independence and the construction of the canal are very significant examples of this policy, as are the numerous armed interventions in Central America. According to P. Bastos [2015], a main issue regarding U.S. intervention was the constant need to employ armed forces in order to preserve fiscal-financial protectorates. It was not enough to intervene only in customs control; it was also necessary to maintain political order and extract fiscal surpluses so that U.S. creditors could continue to receive payments. Therefore, new spheres of foreign sovereignty had to be ignored. This situation, over time,

[...] would increasingly involve containing nationalist revolutionary movements in Latin America. The U.S. administration of the Dominican tax authorities, for example, would eventually lead to military occupation in 1916. The same would be true of Nicaragua in 1912 and 1927 (against Augusto Sandino’s guerrillas), and Haiti in 1917 (authors' translation).

In light of the isolationism that followed World War I, coupled with the effects of the Great Depression, the United States withdrew from extensive interventions, changing its stance only when the outbreak of World War II was already in sight. From then on, Washington’s policy toward Latin America was the subject of innovation through Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy, according to which the U.S. sought to lead the entire region to counter the advance of European Nazi-Fascism and Japanese militarism. The traditional use of force and economic coercion was replaced by increased cooperation, whereby the United States expanded investments and also made an unprecedented cultural rapprochement, for example through the production of Hollywood movies depicting Latin America favourably. This cultural diplomacy aimed at fostering sentiments of Pan-Americanism in U.S. society and abroad [O’Neil, 2005, p. 202].

At the beginning of the Cold War, the United States sought to align Latin American and Caribbean countries through the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), which provided for hemispheric mutual defence and held that aggression by extra-hemispheric powers (in this case, the Soviet Union and the international communist movement) would be considered an attack on all Latin American countries. Months later, in April 1948, the Organization of American States (OAS) was created, whose main task would be to combat communism in the region. From that moment on, the United States again adopted interventionist stances, organizing the sabotage of governments and sponsoring coups d'état in various countries.

This trend reached a new level with the outbreak of the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath, after Fidel Castro's government joined the Soviet bloc. The Cuban Revolution was a watershed in American policy for Latin America. In 1961, the Kennedy government, while seeking a new kind of relationship with Latin America as articulated in Kennedy's speech on 13 March of that year — which would give rise to the Alliance for Progress (APP) — secretly planned the ultimately frustrated invasion of the Bay of Pigs. Regarding APP principles, Kennedy argued:

(...) build a hemisphere where all men can expect an adequate standard of living and all can live their lives with dignity and freedom. (...) To achieve this goal, political freedom must follow material progress. Our Alliance for Progress is an alliance of free governments and must work to eliminate the tyranny of a hemisphere in which it has no rightful place [John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, 1961].

The Alliance for Progress was ephemeral and had no tangible effect. In practice, U.S. diplomacy from the mid-1960s onward supported right-wing military coups to stifle the democratic/nationalist aspirations of local populations and to repress socialist movements: the struggle against communism and the Soviet Union was opposed to any democratizing or self-determining discourses. Only in the late 1970s, during the administration of Jimmy Carter, did the United States signal the reversal of its policy of support for dictatorships, defending respect for human rights and supporting democratic transitions in South America. However, during the administration of Ronald Reagan, the struggle against Marxist insurrection in Central America was intensified and violations of these same human rights were flagrant. Simultaneously, another U.S. concern in this decade was the foreign debt crisis, which negatively impacted the Latin American economy and threatened U.S. banking stability [Volcker, Gyohten, 1993].

During the 1990s, sponsorship of the Washington Consensus liberal policies was the top priority of U.S. policies for the region. As an example, it was Bill Clinton's proposal to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which was launched in Miami in December 1995

during the Summit of the Americas meeting. In the 2000s, the agenda of the U.S. State Department for Latin America was the fight against drug trafficking and, to a lesser extent, against illegal immigration. There was a general diplomatic withdrawal, due in part to the “pink wave” that brought politically left and centre-left governments to power in several Latin American countries. In fact, after the 11 September 2001 attacks, concerns about terrorism and wars in the Middle East absorbed Washington’s attention. The FTAA project was buried in 2005 at the 4th Summit of the Americas held in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

An ephemeral change in the Monroe Doctrine occurred in Barack Obama’s second administration, when it resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba and promised fair relations between the U.S. and the countries of the region. As reported, this occurred in 2013, when John Kerry announced the end of the Doctrine after 190 years. However, the arrival of Donald Trump to office in 2017 brought interventionist principles back into Washington’s political instruments for Latin America and, with them, came the destabilization of governments considered hostile to Washington and attempts to block the actions of countries considered strategic competitors in the region, such as Russia and China.

Latin America as an Object of Sino-U.S. Policies

Sino-Latin American relations have been particularly intense since the early 2000s, driven by the ascension of China to the WTO in 2001, and the strong demand for food, mineral and energy commodities that followed China’s exponential economic growth. Considering the volume of foreign trade, there has been an impressive increase: between 2000 and 2016, trade flows jumped from approximately \$15 billion to \$244 billion, peaking in 2014, when they reached \$280 billion. Trade is concentrated in six countries: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Colombia. Additionally, it is necessary to consider other variables that also explain the intensification of such relations, such as increased financing concessions and Chinese direct investments in the region, which focus on oil, electricity, agribusiness and durable consumer goods.

In addition to economic issues, the Chinese interest in deepening political interaction with Latin America and the possibilities for cooperation as developing countries must be highlighted. The white paper on Chinese policy for Latin America and the Caribbean, published in November 2016, reinforces the terms of a similar document published in 2008, and indicates concrete opportunities for cooperation on political, economic, social and scientific-technological levels.

This outlook was articulated in January 2015, at the first ministerial meeting of the China-CELAC Forum in Beijing, in the China-CELAC Joint Cooperation Plan (2015–2019).

The cooperation structure was defined as a 1+3+6 concept: “1” refers to the cooperation plan itself, which guides specific projects for the period 2015–19; “3” sets out three driving forces for cooperation — trade, investment and finance; and “6” reflects the priority areas — energy and resources, infrastructure construction, agriculture, manufacturing, scientific and technological innovation, and information technology [Pires, 2019].

In order to complement bilateral cooperation initiatives, during the second ministerial meeting of the China-CELAC Forum in Santiago in January 2018, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi urged CELAC countries to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), mentioning the joint construction of greater connectivity both at sea and on land, seeking to integrate open and reciprocal “big markets” and “big industries,” with advanced and independent technologies, as defined by the spirit of the Belt and Road Initiative [Xinhua, 2018].

The increased involvement of China in Latin America and the Caribbean has caused concern and provoked reaction from the U.S. government over the presence of an extra-hemispheric actor in the region. There is a change in the attitude of U.S. diplomats regarding this issue, as between 2005 and 2013 the U.S. showed no concern about the increased Chinese presence in Latin America.

At that time, China was seen as another piece in the U.S.-led globalization process. Shifting industrial production to Asia — and more specifically to China — was a very lucrative strategy as it allowed the use of local comparative advantages to reduce costs and achieve productivity gains. As argued by Suzanne Berger [2005], the processes of productive displacement and outsourcing, as well as the search for cheaper labour, allowed collaboration between a large technology company (Apple, for example) and subcontractors (Qualcomm or Foxconn, for example) to expedite the launch of new products (smartphones). In fact, by 2015, Chinese companies had a subordinate role in globalization, concentrating on non-innovative and low value-added processes. But since then, China has become a strong competitor to western companies in a variety of industries, such as high-tech consumer goods and complex systems/applications, notably in the field of artificial intelligence.

Thus, in principle, the Chinese presence in Latin America may be systemic for the United States: the Chinese buy the raw materials in the region needed for industrial production, and with them, manufacture the cheap consumer goods that guarantee consumer satisfaction and the profits of U.S. companies. The problem with such a scheme is that it is static, as it disregards the possibility that the Chinese will also master cutting edge technologies and create global companies to compete in the international market.

This was implicit from the perspective of the United States government and its senior officials. Take, for example, the statements of three assistant secretaries of state for Western

Hemisphere Affairs: Thomas Shannon, Arturo Valenzuela and Roberta Jacobson, who participated with Chinese diplomats in the sub dialogue on Latin America in the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

In 2006, after attending a meeting with then-secretary-general of the Foreign Affairs Leading Group, Dai Bingguo, and Zeng Gang, head of Chinese diplomacy on Latin America, Thomas Shannon, already in Japan, stated that the U.S. did not consider the sudden Chinese interest in the region as negative, but possibly positive, and discussions — such as the sub dialogue — were important [China Gov.cn, 2006]. At that time, amid strong Chinese demand for commodities, the U.S. saw the Chinese presence as a factor of stability, as it allowed some looseness in the balance of payments of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Similarly, on 19 August 2010, then-Assistant Secretary Arturo Valenzuela, after participating in the U.S.-China sub dialogue on Latin America under the auspices of the third meeting of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, stated that:

We don't see China as a threat (...) in fact, we see China offering Latin America much more opportunities to grow their economies, provide better jobs, raise living standards... We both benefit from a stable and prosperous Latin America, which is much more involved in world trade [Zhang, 2010].

Also for Roberta Jacobson, on 13 November 2013, the United States did not see Chinese involvement in Latin America as a threat, and its presence in the region was not a zero-sum game. The assistant secretary made such considerations after co-chairing the sixth China-U.S. sub dialogue on Latin America in 2013. In addition, she added: “We see China’s growing involvement in this (western) hemisphere — both in business relations as well as in investment relations — as extremely positive” [China Daily, 2013].

As noted, the reversal of the U.S. policy of goodwill toward China in Latin America ended amid strong pressure from the most conservative U.S. sectors already under the Trump administration. If former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is considered as “moderate,” the ascension of former CIA director Mike Pompeo indicated a more assertive, if not aggressive, stance by the U.S. government against the Chinese presence in the region. This is worrying given the context of the trade war that began with Donald Trump’s protectionist measures against China and other trading partners.

Commercial and Technological Disputes Between China and the United States in Latin America

The intensification of trade and technology disputes between the United States and China has strongly impacted the political and trade alternatives of major Latin American countries. It is

important to stress that as long as China did not have a level of development and economic power that could compete with the U.S., it was not seen as a serious challenger. However, Chinese advances in production, finance and technology have changed the landscape of the dispute. The Asian country has a large capacity for action given: its huge foreign exchange reserves, which amount to approximately \$3 trillion; a large import capacity that rivals that of the U.S.; a strategy to support productive and infrastructure investments worldwide through the BRI; and, recent advances in the information technology sector, such as the creation of a competitive base for 5G Internet and artificial intelligence systems that rival those of the United States.

Elements of Global Disputes Between the United States and China

The change of the U.S. attitude toward China from acceptance to confrontation began under Barack Obama's administration, when the concept of an "Asian pivot" was articulated to contain the growing increase of Chinese influence in the region which had started in the early 2000s when rapid economic growth made China the main trading partner of many countries. The turn of U.S. policy toward Asia was announced by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a 2011 speech at the University of Hawaii:

Nowadays, however, we need a more dynamic and durable trans-Pacific system, [...] And just as the United States played a central role in shaping this architecture across the Atlantic — to make sure it worked for us and everyone else — we are now doing the same in the Pacific. The 21st century will be the century of America in the Pacific, a period of unprecedented achievement and partnership in this important, dynamic and complex region [U.S. Department of State, 2011].

In addition, Obama's frustrated initiative — the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which sought to create a free trade area in the Pacific basin without Chinese presence — must be mentioned. In the early days of the Trump administration, the TPP fell apart following Washington's departure from the project.

In fact, since the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017, there has been an escalation of conflicts with China, involving political, trade, technological and defence issues. Some aspects of this dispute are highlighted below.

One China Principle: For China, the One China Principle is a cornerstone of its diplomacy. Since Richard Nixon's visit to China, the United States has pledged to abide by this principle as set out in the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, in which the U.S. government assumed the following position:

The United States recognizes that all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China. The United States Government does not dispute this position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves [Joint U.S.-China Communiqué, 1972].

As a result, when, prior to his inauguration in December 2016, Donald Trump maintained phone contact with the leader of the Taiwan authority, Tsai Ing-wen, Beijing took this to be an affront to the principle of “one China” and as a provocation. Chinese discontent has been aggravated by the sale of weapons to Taiwan and the constant visits by U.S. military vessels to the island. In addition, the U.S.’ open support for independence demonstrations in Hong Kong in both 2014 and 2019 also generally violates the “one China” principle.

Trade War: In March 2018, the Trump government imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum in several countries, including China. In April 2018, Beijing retaliated against U.S. imports and initiated a retaliatory cycle that persists to the present day. This topic deserves a separate discussion, given its complexity and the movements on both sides in this imbroglio that is still far from a solution.

Technology War: In April 2018, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced a ban on U.S. exports regarding ZTE, a Chinese smartphone company. This sanction was lifted in July 2018, after the company paid a \$1.4 billion fine to the U.S. Justice Department. In 2018, Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer of Huawei and vice president, was arrested in Vancouver on 1 December at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice, which alleged that the company had violated sanctions against Iran. In May 2019, Trump issued an executive order banning Huawei from the U.S. and prohibited the export of components to the company; in July 2019, Trump lifted the sanctions on Huawei following a meeting with Xi Jinping during the Group of 20 summit, while China-U.S. trade talks continue.

This issue remains tense, not only due to pressure from U.S. authorities in order to impede the usage of third-party Huawei technologies in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand but also due to restrictions placed on the sale of parts and systems to the company. For instance, on 2 October 2019, Huawei’s smartphone Mate 30 no longer had direct access to the Google Play app store, making it difficult to access Gmail and Maps, among other apps [Keane, 2019].

Belt and Road Initiative x BUILD Act: In 2013, China launched the BRI, a bold economic and geopolitical project aimed at broadening and strengthening regional cooperation. It has two routes, one through land and the other through sea — the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, respectively — focusing on interconnectivity and cooperation, initially between Eurasian countries but later expanded to Africa and Latin America by building basic infrastructure, transportation and communication. In order to support the

funding of the Initiative, the Chinese government created the Silk Road Fund in 2014, with investment forecasts around \$40 billion and also structured the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is intended to complement the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in infrastructure investment projects.

However, such projects have been criticized by Washington and described as debt traps, as loans to poor and already heavily indebted countries would be made without criteria and would lead to default by recipient countries. On the U.S. government's Share America portal, there is harsh criticism of the BRI, whose story is illustrated by a cartoon depicting a staggering individual holding a huge weight drawn with the Chinese flag. According to the portal,

Countries are waking up to the true cost of easy credit and the consequences of being caught in a debt trap, when the lending country uses debt to obtain strategic assets, such as ports or political influence. Sri Lanka opted for a 99-year lease on a key port to China when faced with a difficult loan repayment situation with few other options [Hartman, 2019].

A bipartisan senate commission even sent a letter in August 2018 to the treasury and state secretaries — Steven T. Mnuchin and Michael R. Pompeo, respectively — demanding the U.S. government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to work with developing countries, warning of the alleged risks involved in the loans related to the Belt and Road Initiative. In the document, the senators ask the following questions to the secretaries:

How do you plan to raise the dangers of Chinese infrastructure financing through BRI with the IMF?

Do you believe that additional countries will ask for a bailout from the IMF due to BRI? Which countries?

As the largest contributor to the IMF, how can the United States use its influence to ensure that bailout terms prevent the continuation of ongoing BRI projects, or the start of new BRI projects?

How can the United States work with allies and partners to educate countries about the risks of Chinese infrastructure loans?

How can the United States work with allies and partners to present an alternative to developing nations regarding investment and infrastructure funding? [Office of Chuck Grassley, 2018]

It is interesting to note that the U.S. concerns in this field, in which Chinese influence in the world has grown, cause its elite to forget the U.S.' own stance on its loans to developing countries and its own pitfalls. For instance, sudden changes in interest rates, as occurred in 1979 and 1981, caused economic crisis and debt defaults in Latin America; therefore, "debt trap" is a situation that countries of this region know very well. In addition, following the reforms of the

IMF and the World Bank in the early 1980s, resources for construction of infrastructure, such as hydroelectric dams, ports, roads, irrigation projects, and so on, diminished.

To counter the BRI, in October 2018, the United States created its own infrastructure investment fund, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, through the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD), in order to compete with China in this segment. It is estimated that the new fund could move \$60 billion in loans to developing countries, coordinating state and private actions. Further details are needed regarding the loan requirements, and if they have the same conditions as World Bank credit lines. If so, it is very difficult for a developing country to obtain from the United States more advantageous conditions than those offered by China.

U.S. Pressures Against Chinese and Russian Presence in Latin America

First, it is important to stress that China is seen by Washington as a strategic challenge. This is clear in the 2018 national defence strategy, in which China and Russia are considered the main challengers to the U.S.' world order.

The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the resurgence of long-term strategic competition for what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers. It is becoming increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model — gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic and security decisions. [U.S. Department of Defense, 2018]

This concern has been reflected in American academic debates, both in centres linked to a more “liberal” perspective, such as the Brookings Institution [Piccone, 2016] and others, such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). CSIS senior associate Robert Evan Ellis stands out for identifying the strategic risks of the Chinese presence in Latin America, and for encouraging a more assertive defensive stance on the part of the United States. According to Ellis [2019], Chinese strategic economic needs pose challenges for the United States in the political, economic and military spheres because these needs exist in an international institutional order created by the United States. China's strategic goals tend to challenge dominant states and their economic interests, as China seeks to reshape international institutions and relations toward more favourable conditions for itself.

In politics, China's self-protection leads it to promote multipolarity, including a strategic interest in the survival of populist socialist regimes such as Venezuela, whose existence and attitudes prevent the U.S. from cementing an ideological consensus in the region around open market ideals, Western democracy and universal rights [Ellis, 2019, pp. 144–5].

It is due to this resurgence of hegemonic disputes, which resemble those of the Cold War, that the Chinese presence in Latin America has caused concern in Washington and led to the emergence of the Monroe Doctrine 2.0, this time directed against Chinese and Russian interests in the region. In this sense, although it seems anachronistic, reactivation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR in Spanish and Portuguese) to deal with the Venezuelan crisis is moving the U.S. toward greater involvement in the region, particularly given that China and Russia vetoed external intervention in Caracas' affairs and maintain support for President Nicolás Maduro [O Globo, 2019].

Russian interests in Latin America, especially in Venezuela, are focused on geostrategic resources and geopolitical leverage. Since 2013, the Venezuelan state oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)* — main operator in the country and responsible for more than 95% of Venezuelan export revenues [Gupta, 2020] — has been financed by Sino-Russian investments, guaranteed by extracting resources from the Orinoco Belt. *Rosneft*, Russia's state company, has invested more than \$13 billion in Venezuelan oil assets in the last decade, from oil extraction fields to distribution networks, becoming the main trader of Venezuelan oil overseas.

Therefore, supporting Caracas, from the Russian perspective, is perceived as a geopolitical opportunity to balance the U.S. support toward Ukraine in the Crimean crisis, due to both countries being perceived as their near abroad and an exclusive geopolitical influence zone. In addition, both suffer U.S. sanctions and look for alternative markets and support opportunities; a common trace which may be shared by China [Negroponte, 2018]. Furthermore, there is a military component to Russia-Venezuela relations. Technical support has been provided by Moscow, as well as military personnel, which followed the sale of arms worth \$4 billion to Caracas in the last decade. These events support the classification of Russia-Venezuela relations as “strategic” by Russian officials; it is the first time, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, that Russia was able to intervene in the western hemisphere to support an ally against U.S. regime change strategies, not completely successful either in Latin America [Gupta, 2020; Rouvinski, 2020, p. 4].

Regarding Sino-Latin American relations, three points of friction exist between China and the United States in the region: diplomatic recognition and the “one China” principle; the BRI initiative; and the technological war surrounding the adoption of the 5G Internet standard.

First, it is worth mentioning Chinese diplomatic activism aimed at isolating the Taiwanese government internationally. In recent years, diplomatic relations have been established between China and Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, all countries that have historically been closely aligned with Washington's interests. It is

important to consider that Chinese initiatives for diplomatic recognition were dormant during the Kuomintang Ma Ying-jeou government, to avoid embarrassing a government with which Beijing had a better dialogue in Taiwan. However, the rise of Tsai Ing-wen, from the Independentist Progressive Democratic Party, led China to embark on a diplomatic offensive. Beijing's most recent success came in September 2019, when the Solomon Islands severed ties with Taiwan and established relations with Beijing.

On 5 September 2018, the Senate approved the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI Act) promoted by senators Marco Rubio (R-FL), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Ed Markey (D-MA) and Bob Menendez (D-NJ). The act provides that the State Department may downgrade U.S. relations with any government moving away from Taiwan and suspend or alter U.S. assistance [Office of Marco Rubio, 2018]. Displeased by the choices of Latin American countries, on 7 September 2018, the U.S. State Department convened ambassadors in San Salvador, Panama and Santo Domingo for consultations and to demonstrate Washington's dissatisfaction with the changing status quo.

The participation of Latin American countries in the BRI is another controversial point for the United States, as mentioned. Share America prepared and posted to YouTube a video entitled "Don't Get Caught in the Debt Trap" focused on the situation in Ecuador, which allegedly had fallen into a debt trap by contracting with Chinese companies to construct the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric power plant with repayments to be made via the sale of oil barrels, compromising around 90% of its crude oil solvency abroad [Kraul, 2018; Share America, 2019].

In order to question growing Chinese development financing abroad, the term "debt-trap diplomacy" has been repeated by U.S. analysts as a warning for developing countries. This trap is an alleged Chinese foreign policy measure to turn developing countries into partners dependent on investments and finance by providing them with loans far bigger than their solvency capabilities [Lindberg, Lahiri, 2018]. However, it is questionable that Chinese strategic interests are actually advanced when developing partners cannot repay investments and when international funds usually reject their participation. Resource-secured loan deals, often classified as "unsustainable" — usually by Chinese rivals — would bring financial distress rather than political leverage to Sino-Latin American relations, and much needed resources in China would be compromised when imported from the same finance-fragile partners [Ferchen, 2018].

Furthermore, as infrastructure projects and development cooperation require political ties in order to establish economic agreements, there is a foreign policy discourse component to the evaluation of the BRI's purposes and objectives. It is part of the U.S. reaction toward an ever-growing Chinese presence in trade and geopolitical influence in Latin America that the BRI is classified as Beijing's project to extend global dominance through dependency and debt.

However, Latin American countries have in general benefited from closer ties with Beijing. China is the first or second trade partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, Argentina and Uruguay. In fact, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru and Venezuela are registering trade surpluses with China [Cintra, Medeiros, 2015]. Rather than producing a feasible alternative for developing countries, such U.S. reactions reflect an aggressive discourse based on negativity bias in its attempt to label Chinese development financing as a “web of debt” [Brautigam, 2019, pp. 4–5]. The recently founded U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) aims to compete against the BRI, but as with other U.S. international development agencies, it suffers from lack of funding, making it rhetorical rather than practical [Belt & Road News, 2020].

Regardless of pressures from Washington, 19 Latin American countries already have signed a memorandum of understanding or cooperation agreement with China to join the Initiative. Throughout the last decade, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been included in the BRI as an extension of the Maritime Silk Road. A turning point of LAC’s participation in the BRI was the 2018 Santiago China-Community of Latin American States Ministerial Forum (Foro China-CELAC in Spanish — the LAC equivalent to the African Forum on China-Africa Cooperation — FOCAC), when special memoranda were signed relating the region to BRI [Strategic Comments, 2018]. The main concern of the BRI is infrastructure building; LAC countries are in high need of better connectivity, which benefits the adoption of the initiative. Connectivity is one of the five pivotal priorities of CELAC, as logistical costs represent 18–35% of LAC product prices. To tackle this issue, Chinese financing is being sought in order to improve the viability of several infrastructure projects, such as the Argentinian Belgrano Plan and the Brazilian-Peruvian Transoceanic Railway linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans [Amora, 2016; Malena, 2019].

Establishing multilateral fora as means for negotiation, the China-CELAC Forum raises Latin American leverages in terms of reaching better conditions in China-LAC trade, negotiating as a bloc instead of bilaterally. This approach strengthens ties between developing countries, and China positions itself as a speaker of emerging powers [Brito, 2018]. Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia, despite not having signed agreements, are major recipients of Chinese investments. In the case of Brazil, it is worth mentioning the construction of the Belo Monte line, the purchase of several electricity assets, such as CPFL and CEMIG hydroelectric plants, and the construction of the COMPERJ petrochemical complex in Itaboraí, Rio de Janeiro. The figure below outlines the connections between LAC countries and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Table 1. Connection of Latin American and Caribbean States with the Belt and Road Initiative

Latin American countries that	Caribbean countries that have	Non-aligned	countries
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have joined the Belt and Road Initiative	joined the Belt and Road Initiative	receiving significant investment from China
Signed memorandums of understanding		Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico
Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela	Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago	
Signed cooperation agreements		
Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador	Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname	

Source: [Dabus, Basu, Yao, 2019].

In addition, another very controversial point is the pressure that the United States government has been exerting to prevent Latin American countries from adopting 5G Internet technologies produced by the Chinese company, Huawei. Along with the BRI, which is seen as a Chinese movement to export industrial overcapacity, disputes about which 5G technology is going to be adopted by LAC countries are a major source of conflict between the U.S. and China. The U.S.’ geopolitical views and imposition of sanctions are an important concern for LAC countries, while the growing Chinese presence in the region is being perceived as a threat [Montoya, Lemus, Kaltenecker, 2019, pp. 6–7]. On two occasions, senior U.S. officials have pressured countries in the region to do so. In April 2019, during a visit to Chile, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Latin American countries to be cautious in their relations with China and Russia, two countries that, according to him, “set traps,” “ignore the rules” and “spread the disorder.” The response of the Chinese ambassador to Santiago, Xu Bu, in an interview with *La Tercera* newspaper, was quite harsh. Xu stated that “historically, the U.S. has treated Latin America as its ‘backyard,’ imposing frequent military intervention or sanctions” [Guerrero, 2019]. Furthermore, there are recent examples of U.S. support for its closest allies on banning Chinese advanced technologies.

After establishing new norms aiming at banning Huawei and ZTE from accessing U.S. markets, the United Kingdom followed the same guidelines and planned to ban all 5G technology kits from Huawei by 2027; despite admitting it is going to cause a 5G adoption delay of more than two years, as well as create 2 billion pounds worth of extra costs, “national security” causes were cited as the main motivation [Kelion, 2020; Shepardson, Bartz, 2018].

In August 2019, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, in an interview with *Valor Económico* newspaper, drew attention to the importance of 5G Internet networks and the issues involved in choosing a provider:

5G technology is very different. In 3G and 4G, it is easy to separate core activities, sensitive activities, from peripheral ones. In 5G, because of the nature of software and physical systems, it is not possible. This has security implications. 5G is much more vulnerable to intrusion than 3G or 4G. Imagine

an economy running without GPS, without telecommunications; imagine a breakdown on the internet of things and artificial intelligence, someone bringing down your industry as a whole. These considerations are serious. The interconnectedness of things is, in many ways, wonderful. But it also creates vulnerabilities. Because it means that the damage caused by a cyber invasion is much more widespread and severe than it was in less sophisticated technologies. Therefore, we urge all countries to be very, very aware of who the [5G technologies] vendor is, what the implications are, what vendor relations can negatively affect the [technologies] recipient country [Rittner, 2019, authors' translation].

Ross warned the Brazilian government about the inconvenience of adopting Huawei's 5G Internet technologies, highlighting security issues and the specificity of the Chinese political system, since

(...) the Chinese economy is very different from ours. You should be aware that there is a law in China that requires private companies to cooperate with military and intelligence services, keeping the level of cooperation a secret. We don't have it in the U.S., we don't have it in Brazil. This alone shows the difference in approach [Rittner, 2019, authors' translation].

Wilbur Ross's information would make sense if the world had not had access to Edward Snowden's comprehensive information gathering network. However, the best-informed sectors of society are not only aware of the loss of privacy in electronic communications but are also aware of the manipulative role played by the large digital companies that control major social media networks, notably in the elections since 2016. In response, Chinese ambassador to Brazil, Yang Wanming, in an interview for the same newspaper, rebutted the U.S. secretary's statements, which he stated were baseless:

With hidden intentions, these comments aim to slander Chinese products alleging security risks and disrupt normal economic-trade cooperation between China and other countries in the world. And U.S. officials often resort to political means to interfere with economic activity, 'producing successive lies', which violates international norms and undermines the 'just and equitable order' of world economic cooperation [Graner, Rittner, 2019, authors' translation].

It is relevant to note that the tone of the Chinese ambassadors' responses was harsher than that traditionally used in diplomatic discussions, as the comments of their U.S. counterparts also draw on strong rhetoric, especially under a right-wing populist government. This is the case with the Trump administration, under which aggressive, occasionally insulting rhetoric, especially against China, has become commonplace in foreign policy and diplomatic relations.

Final Considerations

The reintroduction of the Monroe Doctrine into U.S. policy toward Latin America must be observed with scepticism, as the circumstances that have ensured its effectiveness in the past, especially in the Cold War period, no longer exist. On the one hand, the United States no longer has the conditions of yore, as most major international issues cannot be resolved unilaterally. Similarly, due to the technological revolution and China's emergence as a staunch competitor in the digital economy, the U.S.' ability to sustain productivity gains, job creation and even the so-called "American Dream" is no longer the same as in the "Golden Age." This does not mean that any other state can at this moment cast a shadow over the United States, as the country still has a strong system of innovation, enormous military capability, and a worldwide soft power network.

Another important issue to consider is that this is not a competition between two antagonistic economic models, as it was throughout the Cold War. The United States and China are intrinsically linked and interdependent in international productive, trade and financial flows. As much as the Trump administration tries to block the Chinese economic and technological rise, it is impossible to create a "sanitary cordon" around it, as the degree of economic integration and interdependence between the countries makes such a measure impossible. Attempts by the United States to block Chinese initiatives such as the AIIB and the BRI have not found support from traditional partners such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, which in fact were founders of AIIB. The current attempt to pressure allied countries not to incorporate 5G Internet technology into their communication systems is having limited effect.

Finally, when it comes to Latin American and Caribbean countries, it is difficult to totally realign the region to U.S. interests as the degree of interrelations with China has reached a very high level. The Bolsonaro government of Brazil is a good example. While sustaining an openly pro-U.S. stance and being critical of China during the election campaign, the Brazilian government is adopting a neutral stance on Sino-U.S. disputes. In this sense, pragmatism and the desire not to embarrass the country's main trading partner is more important than ideological breakthroughs which still persist in certain government sectors, notably in the ministry of foreign affairs. This logic is valid for countries with governments aligned to the right of the political spectrum, such as Chile, Argentina, Peru and Colombia. Due to the characteristics of export tariffs based on agricultural and mineral commodities, the United States would not be able to supplant Chinese demand as they are in many cases competing in the international market. Therefore, in the face of disputes between two important partners, prudence indicates that neutrality is the best way forward for Latin American and Caribbean countries.

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