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Introduction

On November 6, 2026, Argentina implemented a new regulation for telecommunications supply chain security, effectively restricting the participation of many Chinese companies in the sector. The measure highlights the ongoing attempt at balance by the Javier Milei government there, between doing business with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and measures accommodating US concerns and Argentina's long-term national interests.

Shortly after the December 2023 inauguration of Argentina's maverick libertarian President Milei, he famously proclaimed that he "wouldn't do business with Communists." In the three years since, despite the Milei government's close alignment and cooperation with the United States in other areas, the nation's trade with the PRC has grown significantly, and Chinese projects in Argentina have prospered, including in sensitive sectors such as strategic minerals, telecommunications, and space. The Argentine case is not unique. It illustrates how, for many countries in Latin America, business and other imperatives facilitate Chinese activities in the region even under governments politically aligned with the United States or seeking good relations with it.

The PRC's response illustrated the potential for financial pressure to protect its interests. In December 2023, Beijing suspended implementation of a proposed $6.5 billion expansion of the freely available portion of the PRC-Argentine currency swap, announced in October 2023 under the previous government. The action, coming as the incoming Milei administration sought the financial liquidity to make payments on past International Monetary Fund obligations, sent a strong cautionary message to the Milei administration about its anti-China rhetoric.

In August 2026, China signed a new five-year, CNY$130 billion currency swap agreement, with a Milei government that has, despite its initial hostile rhetoric, avoided actions against Chinese business, space sector, and other interests in the country and has substantially expanded its commercial ties with China's communist government during Milei's three years in office.

Trade

In Argentina, as elsewhere, Chinese companies have continued to expand their supply of goods and services to the country and have purchased agricultural goods with little added value and other commodities. Data from Argentina's national statistics agency, INDEC, show that during the Milei administration, between 2023 and 2025, exports to China rose by 86 percent, while imports from China grew by 24 percent, including a sharp rise between 2023 and 2025. Nonetheless, Argentina continued to run a substantial trade deficit with China.

In 2025, Argentina exported goods worth $9.8 billion to China, while importing $18 billion from China. During the first nine months of 2026, exports to China reached $7.1 billion, up 9.6 percent over the level from the previous year.

China's role as a buyer of agricultural commodities—a key source of Argentina's hard-currency earnings—has been important to Argentina's ongoing economic stabilization efforts, arguably giving Beijing leverage. In 2025, China purchased 93 percent of Argentina's soybean exports.

Despite this leverage, Argentina differs from some other South American countries, such as Brazil, in maintaining a strong trade relationship with the United States. In some ways, that relationship has been more favorable to Argentina. For the first nine months of 2026, Argentina exported 9.2 percent of its goods to China versus 10 percent to the United States Meanwhile, the United States accounted for a smaller share of Argentine imports: 23.3 percent came from China versus 9.2 percent from the United States.

Pablo Quirno, Argentina's foreign minister, will visit China in the coming months, a visit that could pave the way for a long-discussed state visit by President Milei to China.

Mining

China has long played a modest role in Argentina's mining sector, including in Shandong Gold's partnership with Barrick Gold Corporation for the very large Veladero mine in San Juan province.

More recently, Chinese companies have expanded rapidly in lithium, with seven major projects and project groups:

- Cauchari-Olaroz, in Jujuy province, involving Ganfeng Lithium, with a proposed expansion of annual lithium carbonate capacity from 40,000 tons to approximately 85,000 tons.
- Mariana, at Salar de Llullaillaco and General Güemes in Salta, also involving Ganfeng Lithium. The project inaugurated its lithium-chloride plant in February 2025, with stated annual production capacity of 20,000 tons. Its reported $980 million investment included $790 million in project capital expenditure and $190 million for its solar park.
- Tres Quebradas, at Fiambalá in Catamarca province, involving Zijin Mining. The project began production in September 2025, with an annual capacity of 20,000 tons of lithium carbonate and plans to add 40,000 tons per year.
- Consolidated Pozuelos-Pastos Grandes (PPG), in Salta province, involving Ganfeng Lithium. The development targets approximately 150,000 tons of annual lithium carbonate equivalent capacity across three phases, subject to development and financing.
- Solaroz and Jama, in Jujuy province, involving CNGR Advanced Material Co. Ltd.
- Sal de los Ángeles / Litio Ángeles Argentina, in Salta province, involving Tibet Summit Resources Co., Ltd. The first phase, announced in July 2024, would involve annual production of 10,000 tons of lithium carbonate, eventually reaching 30,000 tons per year.
- Arizaro, in Salta province, involving a proposed $175 million acquisition by China Union Holdings Ltd. / Hualian Holdings.

According to an October 2026 China Desk assessment, projects involving Chinese capital accounted for 72 percent of proposed lithium investment submitted under Argentina's Incentive Regime for Large Investments (RIGI) program.

Electricity-Sector Activities

PRC-based companies have not made acquisitions or secured projects for electricity generation and transmission to the degree they have in fellow South American countries Chile and Peru.

In September 2026, the Argentine government formally canceled a long-delayed project for construction of a pressurized water nuclear reactor by China's Gezhouba group.

Nonetheless, since 2018, PowerChina and Shanghai Electric Power Construction Co., Ltd. have built and expanded a large solar complex in the north of the country with a current capacity of 300 megawatts across its three phases.

In addition, Chinese equipment suppliers have participated in several Argentine-owned wind and solar projects. These include Aluar's $400-million expansion near Puerto Madryn in Chubut province, adding 336 megawatts of wind-generation capacity with 56 turbines supplied by Goldwind; TrinaTracker's supply of tracking systems for the 64 megawatt solar component of the Valle de la Puerta wind-solar complex in La Rioja; and Genneia's $110 million, 129.2 megawatt San Juan Sur solar photovoltaic project in Sarmiento department, using equipment from Jinko Solar, Huawei, and Trina Solar. In August 2026, funds were released to China Gezhouba Group Company Limited toward restarting construction of the Néstor Kirchner and Jorge Cepernic hydroelectric dams on the Santa Cruz River.

Chinese battery manufacturer CATL (Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Limited) is supplying batteries for Central Puerto's Nuevo Puerto and Central Costanera storage projects, rated at 150 megawatts and 55 megawatts, respectively. Together, the projects total 205 megawatts and 1,025 megawatt-hour of storage capacity, with Edenor and Edesur as their respective electricity purchasers, to reinforce the Buenos Aires metropolitan grid. Separately, CATL has identified prospective mining and data centers as target markets.

Digital Cooperation

Chinese firms maintain a substantial presence in Argentine telecommunications infrastructure and cloud services, building on Huawei's establishment of operations in Puerto Madero in 2001. Their position varies by market segment: Samsung and Lenovo-owned Motorola dominate the handset market, while Xiaomi, Honor, Oppo, and ZTE/Nubia are expanding their smartphone sales and retail presence. In 2026, Honor opened its first physical retail outlet at Abasto Shopping Center in Buenos Aires, while Huawei returned to Argentina's smartphone market in December 2025 after a six-year absence.

Huawei has become an important player in Argentina's cloud services market. Huawei had 1,500 cloud customers as of January 2026 and has a data center in the Barracas neighborhood of Buenos Aires, with plans for another. In August 2026, US Ambassador to Argentina Peter Lamelas raised security objections to Huawei's proposed cooperation with the Neuquén electricity cooperative (CALF) on another data center.

Highlighting the risks associated with the expansion of PRC digital infrastructure in the country, the Argentine government has also been the target of China-based hackers, including the group FamousSparrow.

In surveillance technologies, the Chinese firms Hikvision and Dahua both have an established presence in the country. In April 2024, Hikvision opened new offices and a showroom in Vicente López, a Buenos Aires province. Dahua Technology's municipal surveillance deployments include a project in Córdoba involving a monitoring center with 114 cameras. A case study published in January 2020 documents Dahua Technology monitoring equipment installed in 400 police patrol cars in the province of Buenos Aires.

Chinese companies are also entering SI-enabled robotics, as part of their broader efforts to capture the global robotics market, focusing on the developing world, just as they have done with other strategic technologies, including solar panels and electric vehicles.

Early examples include Argentine gas transporter TGN's work with Humandroid to develop and train a Unitree G1 humanoid robot and one quadruped robot for hazardous maintenance and inspection tasks, including valve manipulation, leak detection, and plant inspections. Related examples include Unitree humanoid robot training in Córdoba and Unitree robots marketed for security services at the Intersec Trade Fair in Buenos Aires in 2026.

Space-Sector Cooperation

In the space sector, PRC access to Western Hemisphere skies could enable it to collect data from, and conduct operations against, US satellites and communicate with its own offensive space systems during wartime. Argentina continues to be one of the principal access points for Chinese space activities in the region.

Early in Milei's administration, Argentine authorities inspected the Chinese-operated deep-space tracking facility in Neuquén, Argentina, as they had early in Mauricio Macri's US-friendly administration (2015–19). They also reviewed the associated contracts granting operational control of the facility to China Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC), which is affiliated with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), without regular on-site supervision by the Argentine government. Despite its desire to accommodate US concerns, the Milei government, like the Macri government, inspected the facility but apparently concluded that it was not practical to remove the PLA-affiliated CLTC from control of the facility. Indeed, in recent months, CLTC has proposed enhancements to strengthen signal reception, enhance Ka-band communication, and improve high-speed data processing.

Argentina's space agency, CONAE, also signed a January 2022 agreement with the China Satellite Navigation Office to establish a BeiDou tracking station at its Teófilo Tabanera Space Center in Córdoba. Separately, Emposat, a Chinese firm, and Ascentio Technologies, an Argentine company, have developed a commercial satellite ground

station in Río Gallegos; the cited Córdoba agreement does not establish a corresponding CONAE-BeiDou arrangement there.

Although the Milei government halted progress on the nearly completed 40-meter China-Argentina Radio Telescope (CART) in June 2025, the local Argentine partner, National University of San Juan (UNSJ), submitted a restructuring proposal to the Argentine Ministry of Defense in October 2026.

Military Cooperation

Argentina maintains ongoing, nontrivial military and police ties with the PRC. On one hand, the Argentine government abandoned a planned purchase of China's FC-1/JF-17 fighter in favor of US-made F-16 fighters acquired from Denmark and had previously curtailed a purchase of NORINCO WMZ-551 military vehicles for the Cruz del Sur peacekeeping brigade after taking delivery of only four vehicles. On the other hand, Argentina's federal security forces continue to incorporate Chinese equipment, including the September 2025 distribution of 69 Chinese DJI Mavic 3T and Matrice 30T drones by the Ministry of Security, following purchases in August 2024. In August 2024, five Chinese Shacman 2190 6×6 trucks were transferred to Argentina's Pigüé Logistics Support Base as part of an earlier PRC donation of 30 vehicles.

China also maintains diplomatic and education and training-related military exchanges with Argentina. In September 2025, for example, Chinese officers participated in a visit by foreign military attachés to the Argentine Southern Naval Area Command and Ushuaia Naval Base. In November 2025, a PLA delegation similarly visited Argentina's military college. With respect to hosting Argentine military personnel in the PRC, a group of Argentine officers and cadets participated in the PLA-sponsored "International Army Cadets Week" in Nanjing. Argentine military representatives also participated in an August 2026 event held by the PLA Naval Aviation University in Yantai, China. Similarly, from July 29 to August 18, 2024, two senior Argentine Coast Guard officers—Director of Operations and Citizen Protection Prefect General Julio Mostafá and Prefect Major Carlos Watters—participated in the China–Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) maritime police training program.

Beyond official security cooperation and arms transfers, Chinese private security companies continue to explore opportunities in Argentina. These opportunities include the China Overseas Security Group (COSG), which was reportedly recruiting personnel for work in the country.

People-to-People Engagement

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Beyond commercial and security activities, the PRC continues to expand its people-to-people engagement in Argentina at the national and local levels. These activities increase Chinese influence and potentially create opportunities to recruit Argentines for activities ranging from providing insights and writing "papers" for Chinese intelligence organizations, such as the Ministry of State Security (MSS), to other forms of intelligence collaboration.

Argentina hosts four Confucius Institutes (CIs), operating through partnerships between Argentine and Chinese institutions and using Chinese faculty alongside local staff to engage students interested in Chinese language and culture. These institutes were established at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) in May 2009; at the National University of La Plata (UNLP) in November 2009; at the National University of Córdoba in October 2020, initially offering virtual programs during the COVID-19 pandemic before opening for in-person classes in 2022; and at the University of Congress (UC) in Mendoza in October 2024. The institutes are listed in the international Confucius Institute directory. An earlier account reported approximately 15 scholarships annually through UBA alone. Separately, a December 2021 Argentine government announcement described an increase from 40 to 50 annual scholarships for Argentines under bilateral government arrangements. A 2024 presentation by ICUBA director Patricio Conejero Ortiz reported 324 academic-mobility scholarships across several programs, covering teachers, researchers, and students and including short courses, semester and academic-year programs, camps, and the UBA-China program.

Chinese people-to-people programs in Argentina are not limited to Confucius Institutes and associated scholarships. They also include trips to China and other forms of outreach to Argentine think tank personnel, other academics, businesspeople, journalists, political leaders, and military and police officers. China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) estimates that more than 1,000 Argentines participated in its technical training programs and other exchanges from 1983 through 2023.

With respect to media-focused Chinese outreach, journalists from respected Argentine outlets, including Clarín, Página/12, and Televisión Pública, have regularly traveled to China. Recent examples include participation by María Celeste del Bianco of Página/12 in a September 2026 visit to Gansu involving 16 journalists from 15 Latin American countries. A separate July 2026 program in Tibet, Chengdu, and Beijing included participants from Grupo Clarín, Canal 9, and DangDai. An August 2025 People's Daily account identified Grupo Clarín journalists Nicolás Mancini and Hernán Russo as having spent eight months in China. In 2024, Grupo Clarín journalist Fernando Capotondo participated in a four-month training program in the PRC. Around the same time, Leticia Martínez and Pablo Coppari of Televisión Pública received Chinese government scholarships for training. Nora

Veiras, director of Página/12, and Fernando Roperto, editor at Acercándonos Ediciones, participated in a Chinese-sponsored media forum in Chengdu, followed by travel to Sichuan, Guangzhou, and Foshan.

At the national political level, as in other Latin American countries, the PRC has regularly hosted Argentine members of congress and other officials in China. Recent examples include a December 2024 visit by eight members of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, led by Juliana Santillán of the governing La Libertad Avanza (LLA) party. During the same month, senior figures from a range of Argentine political parties made a 10-day visit, including Facundo Pérez Carletti, national secretary of PRO, a party aligned with the government. Santillán led another delegation of LLA and PRO legislators on a weeklong visit in January 2026, little more than a year after her earlier trip.

Relationship building through PRC-funded trips is complemented by the cultivation of ties in Argentina. Businesses with interests in the Chinese market or partnerships with Chinese entities in Argentina receive attention from Beijing. These business ties are exemplified by the Argentine-Chinese Chamber of Production, Industry, and Commerce, in Buenos Aires, currently headed by Javier Lozada, which maintains close ties with and receives regular attention from the PRC Embassy in Argentina.

These relationships also extend to the local level, where PRC largesse toward subnational officials and donations to institutions in their provinces often escape scrutiny by federal counterintelligence and other authorities. Examples include engagement with the governors of Jujuy and Catamarca, provinces where China has substantial lithium interests. These governors have visited China on various occasions. Universities in Argentina's northwest have also received equipment donations, training, and other support from Chinese technology companies.

Conclusion

Argentine companies' business relationships with entities in China and elsewhere is consistent with the laissez-faire policies of a libertarian government such as that of Argentina's Milei. As this article shows, however, these relationships have expanded across strategically sensitive digital and space sectors, military cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. These ties raise concerns regarding undue influence and intelligence penetration and could provide options for the PLA to act against US and other interests in wartime. Argentina is a sovereign country with the right to engage with whom it chooses. Nevertheless, it would be prudent for Argentina to consider how expanding PRC engagement and influence in sensitive sectors could harm its own interests and raise

concerns among major partners such as the United States. Those partners may respond in pursuit of their own national interests.

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