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## **What China's Global Security Initiative Tells Us About Its Strategic Engagement with Latin America**

The GSI speaks repeatedly of China's interest in involving itself in new mechanisms for "governance" of

both traditional and non-traditional security at the global scale.

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Chinese engagement with Latin America may be mostly about commerce, but it is [nonetheless strategic](#) in its character. Its new [Global Security Initiative](#) (GSI) openly highlights the explicitly military and other strategic dimensions of its approach toward Latin America and other parts of the world.

The GSI, [introduced in 2022](#) and outlined in February 2023 through a [Ministry of Foreign Affairs concept paper](#) compliments the 2013 [Belt and Road Initiative](#) (BRI) and the PRC's [Global Development Initiative](#) (GDI) in its evolving and increasingly ambitious narrative about how China seeks to interact with the rest of the world.

On its face, the GSI is filled with superficially non-threatening catchphrases such as “[common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security](#),” “[respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries](#),” “[abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter](#),” and “[peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation](#).” Yet a careful reading of the “[priorities](#)” portion of the document makes clear China's increasing focus on security sector activities as one pillar of its engagement with Latin America (among other regions), and provides troubling insights into how the PRC wishes to proceed.

First, by contrast to other globally oriented PRC defense policy documents like the [2015](#) and [2019 Defense Strategy White Paper](#), in the GSI concept paper, Latin America receives its own dedicated section about security engagement, consistent with mentions of security engagement mentioned in China's [2008](#) and [2016](#) policy white papers toward the region.

The GSI explicitly declares China's support for a role of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in “[playing an active role in upholding regional peace and security and properly handling regional hotspots](#).” In the context of the PRC's past demonstrated preference for working with the region through the China-CELAC forum and its committees and

working group, it is important to highlight that CELAC, per se, currently does not have institutional mechanism for addressing security issues. On the other hand, the GSI notably omits any mention of the [Organization of American States](#), the hemisphere's most established forum for addressing regional security and other issues, which does have institutions to address security matters, including the [Interamerican Defense Board](#) (IADB), the [Interamerican Defense College](#) (IADC), the [Conference of American Armies](#) (CAA), or the [System of Cooperation Among American Air Forces](#) (SICOFAA), just to name a few. The GSI naming of CELAC and omission of the actual security institutions of the established Interamerican system is consistent with the focus of its other security-related initiatives toward the region — including the [China-CELAC 2022-2024 plan](#) and associated China-CELAC forums, such as the China-CELAC Defense Forum, the [China-CELAC Ministerial Forum for Disaster Cooperation](#), and the proposed [China-CELAC Space Cooperation Forum](#) — in suggesting that the PRC not only seeks defense engagement with the region, but deliberately seeks to build new multilateral structures for security cooperation through CELAC, which excludes the United States and Canada, rather than work within the existing security structures.

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The GSI also [explicitly names](#) the transcontinental BRICS forum, in which the PRC works with Brazil (as well as Russia, with which Beijing has expressed a “[friendship without limits](#)”), as a [platform and mechanism](#) for its security cooperation in the

region, suggesting PRC intent to give a new security cooperation dimension to the BRICS as the PRC engages with Brazil's recently returned leftist president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The GSI also speaks of more [international conferences](#), and “[promoting the establishment of more global security forums](#),” in which Latin America could be involved, rather than using established ones, in pursuing its agenda.

Chillingly, the GSI speaks repeatedly of China's interest in involving itself in new mechanisms for “governance” of both traditional and non-traditional security at the global scale in ways that go far beyond Asia. It refers, for example, to its “[Global Initiative on Data Security](#),” and a PRC role in the formulation of [rules for global data management](#), international security governance of [Artificial Intelligence](#) as well as other defense relevant technologies. Beijing's aspirations to to govern the digital domain, and its acknowledgement of such governance as a security matter in this document should give Latin America pause as companies like Huawei, ZTE, Hikvision, and Dahua capture increasingly dominant positions in the region's [digital and security systems](#) infrastructure.

The GSI also speaks of [new global forums](#) and governance mechanisms in which the PRC would play a role, in the domains such as cybersecurity, biosecurity, and counterterrorism. It talks about greater collaboration in the security dimension of [outer space](#), as well as [maritime security](#), in which it mentions [piracy](#) and [armed robbery](#), but curiously not [IUU fishing](#) in which the massive PRC Deepwater Fleet plays a [major role](#).

Finally, the document makes clear the PRC intent to expand its use of “people-to-people” engagement as a tool in the security space, focusing on more exchanges with military and police academies throughout the world, and offering [5,000 billets for training](#) military and police officials from around the world in the PRC over the next five years.

Virtually every country that recognizes the PRC in Latin America sends personnel to [professional military education and training courses in the PRC](#), such as those in its National Defense University in Changping. PRC and Latin American militaries already regularly send delegations to visit each other’s institutions, and the People’s Liberation Army has sent personnel to train in Colombia’s [Lancers course in Tolemaida](#), and Brazil’s [Jungle Warfare School](#), among others.

China’s Global Security Initiative provides confirmation of the policy intent behind expanding PRC security engagement in recent years. Such initiatives include arms sales such as Venezuela’s purchases of [K-8 fighters, anti-ship missiles, JYL-1 and JY-27A radars](#), and armored vehicles from China; Bolivia’s purchase of [K-8 fighters, Z-9 military helicopters](#) and [31 armored vehicles](#); Ecuador’s purchase of [709 military trucks](#); [Trinidad and Tobago’s purchase of an offshore patrol vessel](#) (OPV); Peru’s purchase of [Type 90B Multiple Launch Rocket Systems](#) (MLRS); [Uruguay’s consideration of a Chinese OPV](#); and Argentina’s consideration of China’s [FC-1/JF-17 fighter](#). It also includes a broad array of gifts of vehicles and other equipment to both police and military forces. Recent examples include the donation of [6,000 bulletproof vests and helmets](#) to Panama, three armored personnel carriers and [46 other military vehicles](#)

[to Peru](#), and motorcycles and police cars to [Costa Rica](#), the [Dominican Republic](#), [Guyana](#), and [Trinidad and Tobago](#) among others.

Latin America's current group of left-oriented governments are not as disposed to shying away from military engagement with the PRC to avoid offending the U.S., as were their predecessors. The current Chinese government of Xi Jinping for its part is less disposed to restrain PRC engagement in Latin America to avoid alarming Washington, even while he tells his army to prepare for war with the United States.

The PRC Global Security Initiative may be worded in diplomatic fashion, but the relationships it openly proclaims and the PRC seeks have implications that are anything but benign.

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