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## **China's Charm Offensive in Latin America and the Caribbean: A comprehensive Analysis of China's Strategic Communication Strategy Across the Region [Part I: Propaganda and Politics]**

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# CHINA'S CHARM OFFENSIVE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:

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A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S  
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY  
ACROSS THE REGION

*PART I: PROPAGANDA AND POLITICS*

**PABLO BAISOTTI**

## **JUNE 2023**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>4</b>	Executive Summary
<b>4</b>	Introduction
<b>5</b>	Methodology
<b>5</b>	Propaganda and Politics <i>Latin America</i> <i>The Caribbean</i>
<b>13</b>	Recommendations
<b>15</b>	Conclusions
<b>16</b>	End Notes
<b>21</b>	About the Author

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This paper analyzes the expansion of Chinese media and public diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Through its “discourse of power” and an attempt to extend its soft power across the continent, Chinese and some LAC media (print, audiovisual, and digital) sustained, amplified, and exalted the “achievements” of the Communist regime and the possibility of sharing them as a “community of common destiny” for all the world’s peoples. China strives to promote a positive image through communication and propaganda campaigns, incorporating LAC journalists, academics, politicians, and others who can improve its image as a reliable and supportive partner of the “Global South.”

Recommendations for the United States:

1. Publicize U.S. achievements in LAC by holding press briefings or other events to explain goals and achievements and to strengthen bilateral relations between the U.S. and LAC countries.
2. Strengthen U.S. communication policy in LAC using U.S. and other media. The United States should also counter Chinese propaganda by increasing its strategic communications efforts in LAC through the State Department’s Global Engagement Center.
3. Publish paid advertisements and public service announcements in major LAC newspapers more frequently.
4. Work with U.S. law enforcement to remove Chinese disinformation on Facebook, Google, Twitter, and Instagram.
5. Denounce China’s attempted hegemony of communication networks internationally.
6. Accelerate counter-propaganda to demonstrate the nefarious effects of China’s actions globally.
7. Assess China’s influence in each LAC country, particularly Chile and Brazil.
8. Disaggregate China’s networks of contacts in some LAC countries, especially in Argentina, Colombia, Panama, and Peru—countries with large Chinese diasporas.
9. Expose the danger China represents for the continent in countries with marked autocratic political tendencies, such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Cuba.

10. Expand scholarships for study and research, especially for journalists or independent media. The State Department should increase exchange programs to allow more U.S. media, academics, intellectuals, politicians, and businesspeople to visit the region and invite more LAC influencers from various fields to participate in the Fulbright Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program.

## INTRODUCTION

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China’s phenomenal advance in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in recent decades relied on a well-oiled propaganda machine of continental and global dimensions. That machine is based on a communication strategy and propaganda riddled with “good stories,” omissions, false news, and threats that flooded all communication channels. This coordinated and well-resourced strategy encouraged the incorporation, support, or acquiescence of foreign journalists, think tanks, politicians, and the diaspora, among others, to achieve Chinese objectives such as improving China’s international image and stopping criticism. The Communist Party of China (CCP) accelerated a global campaign to shape public opinion and its policy priorities abroad. According to Freedom House President Michael J. Abramowitz, “Beijing is stepping up its campaign to control how it is portrayed in the world and bend foreign media to its will.”<sup>1</sup> China Global Television Network (CGTN), the global service of state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV); the English-language newspaper China Daily; the People’s Daily; China Radio International, and two news agencies: Xinhua and China News Service, have dozens of overseas bureaus and distribute content in several languages.<sup>2</sup>

This report analyzes China’s communication strategy in LAC through its diplomacy and promotion of a narrative that varies between a discourse of power, promoting itself through “soft power,” and a hard diplomatic line. This is supported by a vast network of print, broadcast, and digital media owned by China or LAC groups. The report also evaluates China’s performance during the pandemic and its “vaccine diplomacy,” as well as attempts to incorporate states into a

“community of common destiny for humanity” through the Belt and Road Initiative. To this end, China is working hard to convey a positive image through campaigns in all possible media, incorporating LAC journalists, academics, politicians, and all those who can improve its image as a reliable and supportive partner of the “Global South.”

## METHODOLOGY

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This research is based on primary information, media, reports, research articles, and interviews. Among the most important sources for this study is Freedom House. In particular, *Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022* frames China's influence in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Panama, and Peru. Sarah Cook's special report, *Beijing's Global Megaphone* (2022), was of great value. Other helpful authors include Margaret Myers, Robert Evan Ellis, and Juan Pablo Cardenal. Essential sources of information came from research centers, academic journals, and university reports. Further, there was useful information in the official releases of the Chinese embassies and consulates, and in Spanish- and English-language Chinese newspapers.

## PROPAGANDA AND POLITICS

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Chinese President Xi Jinping has employed incisive diplomacy and an unparalleled CCP-led propaganda machine.<sup>3</sup> From the early years of the twenty-first-century, creating and purchasing media properties was part of the government's explicit effort to pressure other states or political groups to achieve favorable positions for the party and government. In periods of unrest or crisis, China used these properties to propagate state messages.<sup>4</sup> Alongside traditional diplomacy and person-to-person diplomacy,<sup>5</sup> media expansion allowed for the development of a more open public diplomacy directed at foreign societies “in support of national interests.”<sup>6</sup> Many actors are involved in this type of diplomacy, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bureau of Public Diplomacy, the Ministries of Culture and Education, and the Central Foreign Affairs Commission.<sup>7</sup> There are also other

groups and actors outside the state sphere, represented by the aforementioned media and the Confucius Institutes.<sup>8</sup>

Executive Director of the Andrés Bello Foundation's Latin American Chinese Research Centre, Parsifal D'Sola Alvarado,<sup>9</sup> observed that public diplomacy, although very proactive (as were Chinese nongovernmental organizations), did not have much interaction with the Latin American public. “It is one way, one truth,” he said. A small pro-Chinese portion of the Latin American populace intervenes and interacts. D'Sola Alvarado noted a similar situation in Africa, where the narrative dominance is total, and the response tends to be forceful in the face of any deviation or attack. In general, the Chinese message does not seek to misinform but rather to promote China and highlight its achievements, including the elimination of poverty, technological advances, and its relationships with developing countries, which is very important for the government. Similarly, Chinese soft power is defined by the CCP, with little civil society involvement, unlike in the United States. The interviewee noted the Chinese narrative is kept within narrow, imposed, and manipulated boundaries.

Another type of diplomacy is the digital diplomacy the Chinese government has used to expand its outreach to a broader audience, mainly through online social media.<sup>10</sup> Many diplomats are now immersed in this type of diplomacy, particularly Chinese diplomats, as it creates new spaces for the promotion of a particular narrative and insistent propaganda of the regime to a “common” audience.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the initial rhetoric of developing-country cooperation was gradually discarded in favor of a more North-South relationship,<sup>12</sup> as with LAC.<sup>13</sup>

Xi abandoned diplomatic moderation for a hard and even aggressive line, which led to conflicts and tensions with the United States, the European Union, Australia, Canada, some Eastern European countries, India, and Taiwan, among others.<sup>14</sup> Many Chinese diplomats adopted this confrontational position known as the “wolf warrior” during the pandemic in the face of “Western hostility.” It was characterized by aggressive rhetoric and systematic rejection of criticism of China that was conducted

person-to-person in various countries through interviews or social media.<sup>15</sup> Within this style of diplomacy, Xi called in 2016 for “telling China’s story well” on the global stage. This phrase encompassed the priority of developing soft power while promoting a “discourse of power,” on the premise that China must confidently spread its ideas on the world stage as an alternative to the dominant Western narrative. In July 2014, an article in the *People’s Daily* asserted that it was necessary to convey contemporary Chinese values to create a favorable national image and raise the power of international discourse.<sup>16</sup> In this vein, Xi accused Western countries, especially the United States, of exercising global dominance and attempting to appropriate a discourse of power.

To gain narrative power, China is working to increase its geopolitical capacity by building consensus around an alternative international order that privileges state sovereignty over civil liberties and subordinates human rights to state security. As Xi understands it, this discourse power is based on two premises: “power to speak” and “power to be heard.” Moreover, Chinese external propaganda supports the view that countries should be sovereign in developing and directing their digital economies (especially those in the Global South). In this way, China seeks to narrow the gap with the West regarding the dominance of narratives by increasing its discourse of power and international acceptance.<sup>17</sup> In 2022, Xi emphasized a Chinese “national rejuvenation” by spreading propaganda to the world regarding the best elements of Chinese culture, including a narrative system extolling the country’s “virtues.”<sup>18</sup>

A major goal of Chinese diplomacy under Xi is to enter the “New Era”<sup>19</sup> as a “community of common destiny for humanity.” In a speech to the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013, Xi asserted that humanity had increasingly emerged as a community of common destiny. However, this “shared” notion implied China’s more active involvement in global affairs. In September 2015, Xi replaced “destiny” with “future” in a speech to the United Nations in New York. Later that year, during his New Year’s message, he stated, “let us all strive to build a community of common future for humanity shared by

people of all countries.”<sup>20</sup> In September 2021, at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, Xi proposed a Global Development Initiative (GDI) to help the UN achieve its 2030 sustainable development goals. Shortly afterward, China also launched the Global Security Initiative for harmonious coexistence and cooperation to create a Sanitary Belt and Road and a “Community with a Shared Future in Cyberspace.”<sup>21</sup> The concept of “ecological civilization” was also promoted following the Kunming Declaration signed by more than 100 nations in October 2021 as a “shared future for all life on Earth.” These Chinese “dreams” attempted to build international legitimacy and facilitate China’s rise across the various nations of the Global South.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, Chinese Consul General Liang Caide called for consolidating a community of humanity’s destiny in the face of a handful of countries that practice “unilateralism, protectionism, and hegemonism,” a key concept in Xi’s thinking on diplomacy.<sup>23</sup> In April 2023, in the framework of Brazilian President Lula da Silva’s visit to China, CGTN Spanish of the China Media Group, together with the Latin America Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, held a seminar entitled “Opportunities and Challenges for Building a Community of Shared Future between China and Latin America in the New Era.” At the event, guests from China and Latin American countries shared their views on the importance, relations, exchanges, and development of the Brazil-China relationship.<sup>24</sup>

The recent pandemic did not alter China’s global health strategy but accelerated its realization by justifying authoritarian “medical diplomacy.” China sought to differentiate itself from the United States by funding the World Health Organization, thus multiplying control over the narrative and media within its borders and beyond. For example, it developed defensive communicative diplomacy aimed at discrediting the theory of the virus’ origin.<sup>25</sup> In an interview with researcher Richard Puppin in April 2023, he noted that the pandemic accelerated its soft power strategy toward the region. Alongside assertive Chinese “vaccine diplomacy” such as CanSino, Sinopharm, and Sinovac, attempts were made to dissolve anti-Chinese prejudices, support Latin American governments that lacked the means to effectively

develop their own vaccines, and distance themselves from the United States and Western countries focused primarily on vaccination campaigns. However, Guatemalan and Paraguayan authorities reported Chinese political pressure to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan in exchange for vaccine donations.<sup>26</sup> Another interviewee, researcher Camilo Defelipe Villa, noted that during the pandemic, a particular type of language used in Chinese diplomacy greatly increased. Words such as solidarity, cooperation, and friendship were recurrent in their messages.<sup>27</sup> This message of a “benevolent socialist” character sought to adapt to the desperate situation of the pandemic, but in each country, it had characteristics to “fit” the specific situation. Professor Néstor Restivo argued that the pandemic was ideal for creating a positive image through social media campaigns in favor of its actions and against those who attacked China’s “pandemic” policy. He added that China’s public image was generally good until the pandemic and has since deteriorated as a result of prejudice and racism, fostered, among other sectors, by some U.S. politicians.<sup>28</sup> In stating that its public image was “good,” the author considered China in terms of the contributions of migrants, modernization, and the fight against poverty. He stated that certain studies (Gallup and Pew Research Center) showed that the Latin American population had a much more positive view of China before the start of the pandemic. However, he noted that the image declined after the pandemic and trade dispute with the United States. This was due to certain press operations and harsh reports against China that influenced society.

He highlighted how Covid-19 was called “the Chinese virus,” for example. Regarding human rights, he argued there was a fierce campaign against China in which there was a lot of false news as part of the information dispute with the United States (he used the phrase “with the U.S. imperialist machine”), framed as a cultural battle between East and West. He concluded that the Latin American population does not know what is happening in China and knows even less about human rights. In the middle of the health crisis, the Chinese message further emphasized the importance of building a “community of common destiny for humanity,” linking the concept to the advancement of global health goals. It even advanced the idea of a “community of health and welfare for humanity.”<sup>29</sup>

## LATIN AMERICA

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### Chile

Chile is one of the countries with the largest Chinese economic, financial, and diplomatic presence in LAC. In 2019, Chinese foreign direct investment amounted to US\$4,852 million, compared to Canadian and U.S. direct investment at US\$2,866 million and US\$2,790 million, respectively. By 2020, China was Chile’s largest trading partner. In October of that year, 42.5 percent of Chilean exports went to China. The Chinese Embassy in Chile stated that Chile’s economic development was among the highest in LAC, and its market was mature and stable, with a high degree of openness, “which is why it has become an important destination for investments by Chinese companies in Latin America.”<sup>30</sup>

Researcher Juan Pablo Cardenal noted that every time a draft resolution contrary to China’s interests appeared in the Chilean Congress, the Chinese ambassador called parliamentarians who then abstained from supporting the legislation or absented themselves during the vote.<sup>31</sup> The activity of the Chinese lobby in the Chilean Congress surpassed that of any other country. There were not only calls from the ambassador, but also meetings, visits, and invitations to the embassy or direct trips to China. According to Chilean Deputy Jaime Naranjo, there is permanent action of the Chinese Embassy to intervene in the affairs of the Chilean Congress. Between 2014 and 2019, 21 Chilean deputies visited China, including up to four times, such as the socialist Fidel Espinoza (2014, 2015, 2017, and 2019). In April 2018, for example, Chile’s Foreign Affairs Committee discussed the request by Deputy Tucapel Jiménez to formalize the friendship group between Chile and Taiwan, thus creating an inter-parliamentary group between the two countries. The committee approved it, although days later, a letter from Jacqueline Peillard, the director of international affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, reversed the decision. That month Eduardo Bitrán, the former vice-president of Chile’s government agency *Corporación de Fomento de la Producción*, rejected the Chinese company Tianqi’s purchase of SQM<sup>32</sup> shares, arguing it was a threat to competition in the lithium market. China’s ambassador responded:

"Bitrán has turned the Tianqi process into a political issue and may leave negative influences on trade relations." Finally, Tianqi acquired 24 percent of SQM. Similarly, in 2022, Chinese mining company BYD was awarded a tender to exploit 80,000 tons of lithium in Chilean territory for seven years. In August 2018, Naranjo presented a draft resolution condemning the violation of human rights in China and Venezuela. It was approved. Before and after the vote, calls from the Chinese Embassy threatening economic sanctions resumed. For Naranjo, the Chinese regime's lobbying is unabashedly visible in the Chilean Congress.<sup>33</sup> While the Chinese Embassy's lobbying of the Chilean Congress is not entirely successful, it exerts constant pressure that influences many parliamentarians.

Another researcher, Carlos Portales of the University of Chile, considered that part of Xi's international strategy was to strengthen communication policy by using Chinese media, purchasing advertisements in the best international newspapers, using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; placing opinion articles by Chinese politicians and diplomats, and conducting interviews with diplomats and government officials. An example of this was the "China Connection" project developed with the newspaper *La Tercera*, which, in 2020 alone, published 63 articles, including articles from Chinese state media and interviews with pro-Beijing voices.<sup>34</sup> Until 2020, Chinese ambassador Xu Bu was a classic example of a wolf-warrior, constantly attacking those who criticized Beijing's narrative or Chinese companies like Huawei, which he compared to U.S. companies, pointing out the latter preferred to shelter behind military interventions and sanctions.

In 2019, the Chinese Embassy bought eight full pages in *El Mercurio* to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the country's founding, with articles written by Chinese and Chilean diplomats, academics, public opinion leaders, and businesspeople. Xu's successor, Niu Qingbao, was less antagonistic. Social media communications became more active during the pandemic, while China simultaneously sought to deepen ties with local media. Some of the latter, such as *El Mercurio* and the business magazine *América Economía*, published content from

Chinese state media. In 2020, the newspaper *La Tercera* signed a content-sharing agreement with the China Media Group to amplify the Chinese message, often through its diplomats. The main themes revolved around the benefits of cooperation and responses to international criticism. The Chinese effort in Chile to counter the pandemic was also emphasized. In 2021, Qingbao published an op-ed, "Building a Bridge of Civilization Exchange and Mutual Learning with Global Civilization Initiative," which mentioned the Global Civilization Initiative's "four common initiatives," which, according to the diplomat, coexist and learn among different civilizations. The fourth initiative focused on strengthening international exchanges and cooperation among peoples to advance human civilization. It also published an op-ed accusing the United States of being the source of the virus. Both ambassadors did little more than repeat disinformation and attack the United States to varying degrees by spreading a distorted narrative.<sup>35</sup>

### **Argentina**

In Argentina, the Chinese Embassy maintains close ties with various media groups, academics, political leaders, and prominent individuals on social media. Chinese ambassadors published dozens of op-eds, gave interviews to local media, and conducted briefings to disseminate the narratives conveyed from Beijing (Xi's visits, environmental development, economic growth, poverty reduction, pandemic response, and criticism of the United States). Chinese diplomats in Argentina generally avoided the aggressive wolf-warrior style but instead opted to promote China as a partner for development and multilateral cooperation. Following this stance, and with the pandemic underway, Chinese diplomats launched a propaganda campaign that included radio and television interviews and opinion pieces published in local media highlighting Chinese actions and other issues. For example, the embassy published more than 20 articles in 2021 in major media outlets such as *Perfil*, *Ámbito Financiero*, *Página 12*, *BAE Negocios*, *Clarín*, *El Economista*, *El Cronista*, and *Télam*.<sup>36</sup>

## Panama

In Panama, Chinese state media and diplomats promote narratives highlighting the benefits of cooperation. The Chinese Embassy, the Xinhua News Agency, and the China Radio and Television Administration agreed to exchange content or inserts in major media outlets, including *La Estrella de Panamá* and public broadcaster SERTV. Chinese diplomats in Panama are active on Twitter and regularly give media interviews and publish editorials in local media promoting the benefits of cooperation, the fight against the pandemic, and other “goodies” such as poverty alleviation or the superiority of the Chinese political system. The Chinese Ambassador to Panama, Wei Qiang, also attacked Western politicians and media—especially those related to the United States—via Twitter and other media outlets. In 2018, *La Estrella de Panamá* published an op-ed column written by Xi before he visited the country. Qiang also published several op-eds in that newspaper, *La Prensa*, and other media outlets, and gave interviews to local media. In addition to attacks on Western politicians and media, he also defended China's health policy and questioned the origin of Covid-19.<sup>37</sup>

## Peru

In Peru, the Chinese Embassy reacted against any support for Taiwan's independence and U.S. support in the region. Likewise, Chinese state media and diplomats highlighted the Sino-Peruvian strategic partnership and relied on the large local ethnic Chinese population to amplify its narrative. Peruvian editorial lines, therefore, became more favorable to Beijing as the Chinese ambassador promoted false and misleading news to the local populace, particularly on the United States, the pandemic, and illegal fishing.<sup>38</sup>

## Brazil

Chinese diplomats and state media (China Radio International, China Central Television, China News Service, and Xinhua) have recently become active in public diplomacy in Brazil while increasing their presence on social media. Cooperative agreements with Brazilian public and private media were renewed, and Chinese diplomacy began to defend the narrative transmitted from Beijing more strongly, particularly in relation to Taiwan and Covid-19. It was during this period that wolf

warrior-type messages began to increase. Peaks occurred in March 2020, generally in the face of criticism from Brazilian officials, such as President Bolsonaro's son, who blamed China and its model of governance for the pandemic. In May, the Chinese Embassy published op-eds defending China against accusations that the pandemic had originated in a laboratory in Wuhan and that the government had not been truthful in dealing with Covid.<sup>39</sup> The *China Daily* newspaper paid to publish propaganda and reports in major Brazilian newspapers, such as *Folha de Sao Paulo*, *Editora Globo*, and *Correio Brasiliense*. Likewise, Chinese diplomats were regularly interviewed by these media outlets and on radio, television, Twitter, and Facebook. In particular, Chinese Ambassador Yang Wanming promoted false or misleading narratives about human rights in China. For example, he published an op-ed in December 2021 in the *O Globo* newspaper entitled “Neo-colonialism disguised as democracy,” positing that some states (referring to the United States) remain obsessed with the idea of a superior civilization “under the guise of democracy” and that it was, in fact, a form of “neo-colonialism.” His successor from 2022, Zhu Qingqiao, has continued in the same vein.<sup>40</sup>

## Uruguay

In Uruguay, Chinese Ambassador Wang Gang reached out to Uruguayan institutions during the pandemic and offered his country's support. Unlike many Chinese diplomats in LAC, Gang is not a wolf warrior.<sup>41</sup> However, his attitude was the opposite in 2019, when he attacked the United States for starting a trade war with China by “adopting a series of unilateral and protectionist measures, imposing at will the cudgel of tariffs.” He threatened that, if this position continued, China would never be afraid to defend its interests and rights.<sup>42</sup> During the pandemic, the ambassador argued that “the Chinese people and people all over the world have helped each other” in building a “community of destiny for mankind.” He highlighted the assistance to Uruguay and the positive response of its president and government, as well as the media “writing a great chapter for China-Uruguay friendship and strategic partnership.”<sup>43</sup>

## Colombia

Chinese Ambassador Lan Hu highlighted China's interest in Colombia, describing it as "its preferred destination in Latin America." He recalled the various cooperation projects such as mining in Buriticá, Antioquia, and the progress made in "overcoming various difficulties."<sup>44</sup> He also wrote about the pandemic, stressing that both countries were committed to multilateralism "as a response not only to the pandemic, but to all current and future challenges of the international community." He called for a more just, sustainable, and peaceful international system to achieve an "interconnected and interdependent global village and humanity, a community with a shared future."<sup>45</sup> In another op-ed, he described Taiwan's situation and the "revitalization of the nation" in the face of opposing tendencies such as the United States and provocations, which, he said, "will receive the punishment it deserves." He accused the United States of being an obstacle to China's resurgence and "the architect of cross-strait conflict."<sup>46</sup>

While Colombia is historically considered one of the United States' most important partners in LAC, trade tensions between the United States and China could change it, for better or worse. The election of Gustavo Petro to the country's presidency in 2022 is another factor. Regarding the first issue, the Colombian economy is growing in the U.S. market. According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, exports of Colombian products amounted to US\$3,745 million in 2022, a growth of 81.5 percent compared to 2019. María Claudia Lacouture, president of the Colombian-American Chamber of Commerce, said that this was due to an exceptional situation in non-mining energy goods and export diversification, driven by the tariff benefits provided by both countries after the entry into force of the Trade Agreement in 2012, and by the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries. Legislative initiatives in the U.S. Congress (such as the Western Hemisphere Nearshoring bill) are also trying to decrease the dependence of U.S. manufacturing on China, which could generate economic opportunities in LAC.

With regard to the new Colombian government, the situation is more complicated and uncertain with Petro as president. The country could soon apply to join the Belt and Road Initiative,

accelerating trade with China and political rapprochement. China is Colombia's second-largest trading partner after the United States. In 2021, China was the second-largest importer of goods from Colombia and the largest exporter to the country. That year, China focused on three Latin American economies: Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, which accounted for 77 percent of its investment. Particular interests in Colombia focused on mining, energy, and technology, with Huawei and ZTE standing out. Petro's coming to power could become an incentive for China to expand its influence in the region and weaken the traditional ties between Colombia and the United States.<sup>47</sup>

## THE CARIBBEAN

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### Antigua and Barbuda

Chinese diplomats and media outlets have been equally active throughout the Caribbean. The Chinese Ambassador to Antigua and Barbuda, Zhang Yanling, repeatedly used the *PointeXpress* newspaper to convey information, carry out nationalist propaganda, and continue the CCP narrative. She expressed hope for political ties between the two countries, cooperation within the GDI, and hopes for more Chinese infrastructure in Antigua and Barbuda, such as the Big Creek Bridge. Zhang stressed China's will to create a "great modern socialist country" that could produce a new form of human civilization and promote post-pandemic recovery. She also called for accelerating the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with Xi's proposed GDI. In addition, she noted the need for broad multilateralism and an open global economy that would "amplify the interaction between domestic and international markets and resources." She also refuted some local and foreign media reports on the Taiwan issue and called for Antigua and Barbuda's support for reunification. She said that China is a state that provides "certainty and stability in its own way to an uncertain and unstable world."<sup>48</sup>

### **The Bahamas**

The Chinese Ambassador to the Bahamas, Dai Qingli, contributed several op-eds and propaganda articles to the country's leading newspaper, *The Nassau Guardian*. He reaffirmed "friendly" contacts, ties with the country, and cooperative efforts, such as "Thomas Robinson Stadium, the Airport Expressway, and Baha Mar as symbols of China-Bahamas friendship." He then underlined China's support in the face of Hurricane Dorian and the pandemic and the willingness—as did the ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda—for China to transform itself into a modern socialist country. He called for deepening relations based on "one China," non-interference in internal affairs, and visits between governments, parliaments, and political parties. He stressed that "friendship" moved China to help encourage trade and address common challenges, such as pandemics, pollution, and poverty. He contended that this required implementing a "community of destiny of mankind" through the Belt and Road to achieve "common prosperity for all, parallel material and cultural-ethical advancement, harmony between mankind and nature, and peaceful development."

Xi wished for peace between Russia and Ukraine and rejected "the practice of a small number of countries confronting each other and fanning the flames." Finally, he affirmed opposition to the United States and the West, considering it a war between "good and evil," noting the West is shirking its responsibilities and using the indiscriminate use of violence to "solve all complex security problems." For all these reasons, the ambassador highlighted Xi's position, the Global Civilization Initiative, as an oasis of respect for the diversity of the world's civilizations, through equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and development, etc.<sup>49</sup> Reaffirming Qingli's words, the counselor and spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in the Bahamas, Cui Wei, wrote an article in another major newspaper, *The Tribune*, albeit more explicitly accusing the United States of possessing a misguided view of China in the Caribbean rooted in a "strategic anxiety and zero-sum mentality." He argued that Latin America and the Caribbean should not be anyone's backyard, nor the scene of competition between large countries, which he concluded was a Cold War mentality.<sup>50</sup>

### **Barbados**

The Chinese Ambassador to Barbados, Yan Xiusheng, is one of the most active Chinese diplomats in publishing articles in the media. Like all other Chinese diplomats in the Caribbean, he chose a leading newspaper, *The Barbados Advocate*, to put forward his ideas, propaganda, and narrative. He stressed that the "fundamental interests of the two peoples and the prosperity and stability of the world" was at the heart of the trade dispute between China and the United States. He referred to the situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the riots (alleged radicalized protesters) and how China alone should handle this issue. In another paper, he emphasized the pandemic and how China is providing "relief" for its prevention, control, and treatment, stressing the importance of global cooperation and "solidarity." He then emphasized that one value of humanity was democracy, "an ideal that has always been cherished by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people." He asserted there was no single or absolute model of democracy and that attempting to impose one would lead to bloc confrontation. He wrote that China opposed "hegemony and power politics" and that Xi would lead the country to build socialism with Chinese peculiarities in the new era. He argued for Chinese modernization, synonymous with "common prosperity for all, material and cultural-ethical progress, harmony between humanity and nature, and peaceful development." He also recalled the bilateral ties between China and Barbados and cooperation in all areas (such as the construction of the Sam Lord's Castle Hotel, the Centre for Food Security, and the rehabilitation of roads), especially during the pandemic and in the search for a GDI and Global Security, which included Barbados.<sup>51</sup> According to Leland Lazarus of the Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy at Florida International University, the Chinese Embassy most likely entered into an agreement with *The Barbados Advocate* to republish full-page articles from Xinhua and CCTV, painting China in a positive light. Lazarus, who tracked China's growing influence in the Caribbean as a U.S. State Department Foreign Service Officer at the embassy in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, suspected that China gave *The Barbados Advocate* much-needed funding to keep it afloat in exchange for positive news coverage.

## **Dominica**

The Chinese Ambassador to Dominica, Lin Xianjiang, was active in publishing op-ed articles in Dominica's press, choosing the leading newspaper *The Chronicle Newspaper* and the *Dominica News Online*. In May 2022, in the latter publication, he extolled the friendship and cooperation between China and Caribbean countries and how relations had been deepening under Xi for the "building of a closer China-Caribbean community with a shared future." He highlighted Chinese support during the pandemic and envisaged the same support thereafter, as Caribbean countries "support the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping and commend China as a responsible and leading player in the international arena." He insisted on China's quest for peace and denounced threats "posed by hegemony and power politics" along with terrorism, climate change, cyber security, and refugee crises. Therefore, it is inferred that Xi is thinking of a solution for all humanity (Global Civilization Initiative), starting with constructing a modern socialist country "in all respects." Otherwise, the gap between the Global North and the Global South would continue to widen, according to the diplomat. He added they should "Absorb the nutrients of other civilizations with an inclusive attitude and break down barriers and prejudices in the process of mutual understanding and learning."<sup>52</sup>

## **Grenada**

The Chinese Ambassador to Grenada, Wei Hongtian, published or reprinted his words in the country's two leading newspapers, *Now Grenada* and *Informer*. In a style similar to his peers, he stressed the importance of diplomatic relations between China and Grenada based on equality, as well as the cooperation and friendship that united them in the face of global problems and challenges such as climate change, poverty, and pandemics. He highlighted national issues to revitalize the economy, education, sports, and the "joint" implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the GDI. He also called for global modernization and peaceful development among countries, care for nature, and Chinese-style democratic development that gave "full expression to the CCP's guidelines, the will of the state and the expectations of the people, uniting the Party, the government and the

people behind shared goals, interests and aspirations." He considered that the United States had intentionally left almost half of the world's countries and regions behind by dividing them into democratic and non-democratic. He, therefore, reaffirmed that Chinese-style modernization "does not follow the old path of colonial plunder."<sup>53</sup>

## **Jamaica**

The Chinese Ambassador to Jamaica, Chen Daojiang, is arguably one of the region's most active and prolific Chinese diplomats and propagandists. He chose the *Jamaica Observer* and *The Gleaner*, the island's leading newspapers, as his principal newspapers. Like other Chinese diplomats in the Caribbean, Daojiang extolled and exalted issues such as cooperation and friendship, people-to-people exchanges, and mutual gain. He listed the number of jobs created or the infrastructure works (the North-South Highway, the upgrading of the South Coastal Highway, the new headquarters of the Jamaican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade) and other construction projects important to the people, such as Western Children's Hospital. In another article, he pointed to Xi's leadership that allowed China to become a "modern socialist country and achieve the great rejuvenation of the nation." Other recurrent issues for the ambassador within the GDI framework include the fight against poverty, climate change, COVID-19, the pursuit of food security, industrialization, and the digital economy and connectivity. In an interview with *Jamaica Information Services*, he affirmed the changes ahead for humanity and, in such circumstances, said we should continue to "promote the building of a community of destiny of humanity to strive together for a better and brighter future for our world." He called for promoting the China-Jamaica Strategic Partnership to a higher level.<sup>54</sup>

## **Guyana**

The Chinese Ambassador to Guyana, Guo Haiyan, is an active columnist for the *Guyana Chronicle*, the country's largest newspaper. He follows the same blueprint as his diplomatic colleagues, extolling ties with Guyana, supporting Chinese demands such as the one-China principle, and urging Guyana's continued cooperation toward a "better era." According to the diplomat, this would be realized through the

Belt and Road Initiative, multilateralism, “and the common interests of developing countries.” He highlighted the two countries’ fight against the pandemic and the acceptance of the GDI to adhere to “the common values of humanity for peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom.” Guo argues this is opposed to a zero-sum game, hostility, or confrontation, which is why China sought a peaceful solution to the war between Russia and Ukraine. One goal was Chinese modernization for the common good, “coordinated material and cultural-ethical advancement,” and bridging the gap between states. He criticized some countries for their selfish interests in selling a “false narrative called democracy versus authoritarianism” to introduce turbulence into the international community.<sup>55</sup>

### Suriname

The Chinese Ambassador to Suriname, Han Jing, gave an interview to *STVS* expressing his views on the bilateral relationship. He affirmed that a strategic cooperative partnership existed with the country and that, thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative, cooperative relations would be strengthened in the near future, and that, thanks to Xi, exchanges with LAC would be deepened “to build a community of shared future.” He raised China’s assistance to Guyana (the 350 houses project and the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Centre) and asserted that China was not a threat or a challenge, which is why he proposed GDI and anti-pandemic assistance.<sup>56</sup>

### Trinidad and Tobago

The Chinese Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, Song Yuming (2016 to 2020), opined through op-eds in major newspapers, such as the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*. He mentioned the pandemic threat, recalling Xi’s words in which he affirmed the need to respond collectively to “foster greater synergy so that humanity as one can win the battle against such a major infectious disease.” He highlighted China’s support for the country during that period “to contain the virus.” His successor from 2020, Fang Qiu, also made use of major newspapers in the country, such as *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* and the *Sunday Express*, by returning to the theme of the pandemic, the historical ties between the two countries, the excellent cooperation, and the desire for Trinidad and Tobago to join the Belt and Road

Initiative. He said he wished to explore trade cooperation, governance, education, health, ecotourism, and eco-agricultural technologies based on innovative technologies such as 5G and artificial intelligence. He said China opposes ideological bias, fake news “in the name of freedom of the press,” criticizing the United States for banning Chinese apps and internet companies “for political reasons.”<sup>57</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- China’s influence, at all levels, is based on a well-oiled communications machine and a rhetoric of good (China) versus evil (the United States). U.S. diplomacy and media must constantly and patiently explain and report on the danger China poses to the continent. China’s civil-military dual-use ambitions, and even its continued interference in the national affairs of Latin American states, for example, with technology for controlling citizens in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, are particularly alarming. U.S. diplomacy and media should try to banish any hint of a North-South relationship with the continent. This is free propaganda for China. On the other hand, it is essential to highlight diplomatic aid and support to LAC countries through constant digital diplomacy and open, transparent, and friendly diplomacy, such as that carried out by the U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, Mark Stanley.
- China’s first line of communication is to exalt the “virtues” of the regime and its proclaimed achievements: the elimination of poverty, technological advances, its relationship with developing countries, and the fight against covid. To amplify this message, many Latin American media outlets, as well as journalists, politicians, academics, etc., are seduced or co-opted by China, and the message is amplified as it is adapted to the local population, as it is easier for a Peruvian journalist to talk to the people of Lima than a Chinese one. In many cases, such virtues are simply a gross exaggeration since the United States ultimately donated more vaccines to the region than China.<sup>58</sup> However, in many places in LAC, it is believed that the United States acted selfishly regarding vaccines. These issues must be brought to light because China is exploiting this to accuse the United

States of having an imperialist mentality. A weekly press conference and other events with the U.S. ambassador, other diplomats, or U.S. personalities explaining the relations between the two countries and other issues would strengthen bilateral relations.

- The United States should strengthen its communications policy in LAC, including paid advertisements in the same regional newspapers that China uses. The United States should also increase its budget and efforts for strategic communications efforts in LAC through the State Department's Global Engagement Center. The State Department could also increase exchanges to allow more U.S. academics, intellectuals, politicians, and businesspeople to visit the region and invite more LAC influencers from various fields to participate in the Fulbright Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program. U.S. law enforcement agencies should work together to remove Chinese disinformation on social networks like Facebook, Google, Twitter, and Instagram. Chinese diplomats and armies of Chinese political supporters in LAC constantly engage on social media, often with distorted propaganda. It is paradoxical that U.S. social networks have become Chinese propaganda platforms, even going so far as to criticize U.S. policy.
- Another great danger China poses to the United States and the global communication system is controlling the information hubs through which all information passes, which can be manipulated, filtered, or falsified. It must be denounced and fought, and an international consensus reached to remove a country that wants to take over world communication to transform it into benign propaganda for the communist regime. These actions must occur at the diplomatic and political levels and through counter propaganda to demonstrate the harmful effects of China's actions. This could be done by opposing China's law-based governance of cyberspace and by making the issue multilateral and debating it in international fora like the United Nations.
- The United States should pay closer attention to South America. While each LAC country has distinct characteristics, Chile and Brazil are where China could cause the most complications for the United States.

In both countries, China has penetrated the economic and financial interests, and they could serve as the Chinese entrance to the continent through the Pacific and Atlantic. Both presidents in power (Boric and Lula da Silva) are left-leaning political leaders that China is using to its advantage, with the timeworn rhetoric of the "anti-imperial struggle," and other issues such as "solidarity and cooperation," emphasizing the potential benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative.

- Argentina, Colombia, Panama, and Peru are cases in point. In these countries, the Chinese Embassy has an important network of contacts, in addition to a large Chinese diaspora that could amplify the slogans of Xi's communist government. Except for Panama, these countries had internal conflicts for decades, along with regular anti-U.S. rhetoric. That image persists for many people. Some politicians from these countries were members of militant organizations, such as President Petro of Colombia.
- Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Cuba are countries where China feels comfortable and openly operates in search of economic benefits, supporting the policies of these routine human rights abusers. Denouncing these Latin American governments and China should continue. Scholarships for study and research should be extended, especially for members of the media and local civil society organizations.
- In the Caribbean, the messages of Chinese diplomats contain the same themes, pointing to the "global" union of humanity while criticizing the West and the United States. The Chinese narrative in these countries highlights their role in the fight against the pandemic and the promoting, financing, and constructing of much-needed infrastructure. In the Caribbean, it seeks to plant and expand the idea that China is a "great modern socialist country" and that—through the cooperation of the Global South countries—all countries can achieve the goal of a Global Civilization in a New Era.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

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In the last decade, China's global economic progress has been a "Trojan horse" for expansive international geopolitics. Pragmatically, the Chinese government has been trying for decades to consolidate and increase its economic potential by engaging with all kinds of governments, from dictatorships to democracies, thus demonstrating a feigned ideological indifference. China's communication strategy was fundamental to transmit, convince, seduce, and co-opt various actors, from governments, diplomats, politicians, and international organizations to the press, academia, diaspora, and citizens from all continents.

China devised a sizable party and state-led propaganda network designed to portray the country as a model, Xi as a benefactor of humanity, and communism as morally superior to the "selfishness" of the West. Grandiloquent phrases that constitute a mixture of indoctrination and vague rhetoric, such as "for the good of humanity," "new humanity," and "fight evil demons," can be found across the spectrum of Chinese media. This creates a dynamic in which good and evil are defined as those for and against China. At the same time, China's communication strategy abounds in cultural and social issues without political, economic, or diplomatic interest. With the passage of time and the inclusion of foreign media and journalists in LAC, a more complex language came into use because of the intervention of local or diaspora workers, who naturally handle the regional linguistic variants of Spanish and Portuguese.

Chinese economic and political propaganda has penetrated LAC, and despite the reluctance of some actors, progress is evident, affecting the preeminence of the United States throughout the continent. The communication system and strategy toward LAC were based on a vast network of print, audiovisual, and digital media that presented China as a reliable and supportive partner of the Global South. The objective of achieving this, beyond the economic one, is to control the information nodes in order to exercise censorship, manipulation, and the dissemination of false content, ultimately favoring the CCP's

ideological objectives. As noted, the Chinese media set out to win foreign followers to its cause through training, invitations, and other types of flattery such as meetings, congresses, face-to-face and virtual seminars, workshops, and training programs to reinforce and amplify the regime's message.

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