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To cite this article: Stephen Blank & Younkyoo Kim (2015) Russia and Latin America: The New Frontier for Geopolitics, Arms Sales and Energy, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62:3, 159-173, DOI: [10.1080/10758216.2015.1019817](https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1019817)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1019817>



Published online: 07 May 2015.



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Russia and Latin America

The New Frontier for Geopolitics, Arms Sales and Energy

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Russia attempts to leverage itself onto the global stage and be portrayed as a global power that must be consulted on major global issues. It does so in order to claim a status of equality with the United States and force it to consider Russian interests before the United States acts in those regions where Russia claims to have vital or important interests, even though its ability to play on a truly global stage is quite limited. Nevertheless, for the reasons advanced above, in Latin America Moscow endeavors to cut a global figure, even if its commercial presence there pales relative to the U.S. or Chinese presence. Although world attention now focuses on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is once again simultaneously expanding its presence in Latin America. Since this process has received little scrutiny, this paper attempts to provide an assessment of Moscow's goals, strategies, tactics, and policy instruments.

INTRODUCTION

Latin America is not generally thought of as a high priority for Russian foreign policy. But as relations with the United States remain as underappreciated as they did in 2008, Russia is apparently turning greater attention to that region in order to advance its goals and diminish U.S. power. Russia's return to Latin America has only become possible by virtue of Russia's recovery in 2000–2008. As W. Alejandro Sanchez aptly stated, “the Americas is an area actively being courted by different powers, with Moscow regaining a prominent role in western hemispheric affairs.”¹

Indeed, recent major events in Latin American international relations all show Moscow either trying to play a greater role than before or else being a power that is considerably affected by these trends. Thus the announcement of an end to the U.S. isolation of Cuba can only reduce Cuba's dependence on Russia for economic aid, investment, and trade over time, as well as the attraction of Russia as an alternative to the United States. Second, Nicaragua's

announcement that it has begun work on a trans-oceanic canal, financed by Chinese money and where Russia is angling for the contract to provide security, betokens Moscow's desire to cement partnership if not alliance relations and a military footprint in Latin America with like-minded governments.² Third, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's declaration in November 2014 that, “Given the situation that has developed, we have been forced to provide a military presence in the western part of the Atlantic Ocean, in the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean, and in the waters of the Caribbean Basin and the Gulf of Mexico.” signifies the escalation of Moscow's decision to challenge the United States militarily as well as more generally strategically throughout the Americas.³ Shoigu here emphasized the need for aerial reconnaissance of foreign (i.e., U. S.) militaries using Long Range Aviation aircraft and training missions for these pilots in these specific areas.⁴ In a further expansion of Russia's military investment in Latin America, Shoigu's deputy minister, Anatoly Antonov, subsequently indicated that Russia plans to build up military and military-technical cooperation with Latin American countries by establishing logistic support (MTO) facilities there for ship calls and by using local airfields in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Although he denied that Russia was interested in bases, clearly that is exactly what is involved here; although it is being arranged, in imitation

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of the U.S. naval presence in Asia, as “places not bases.”⁵ All of the foregoing recent events and statements should underscore the fact that Moscow has a growing investment in Latin America. This investment is not just strategic in the wider sense, but also has a military component, intended as a direct challenge to Washington, which is steadily growing.

Much has been written about what drives Russia’s foreign policy in Latin America.⁶ Many analysts tend to agree that Russia’s quest for power and influence in Latin America is driven by geopolitical considerations. But previous studies on Russia–Latin America relations have failed to come to grips with how the sale of arms and energy deals, as well as the search for military bases and lasting political influence, all go together in Russian foreign policy. This essay represents an attempt to rectify this lacuna in our analysis by examining the objectives and instruments of Russian foreign policy in Latin America. The focus will be on Russia–Latin America relations in 2010–14. As tensions between the United States and Russia over the future of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula continue to rise, the parallel to Ukraine is apparent with regard to the Latin American countries. In 2014, the United States does not see Latin America as a priority as compared to Asia or Europe. We argue that in Latin America Moscow endeavors to cut a global figure even though its commercial presence pales relative to the U.S. or Chinese presence there. Although world attention now focuses on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is once again simultaneously expanding its presence in Latin America.

RUSSIA–LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS

Although Latin America was an important theater of the Cold War, Russian diplomacy toward Latin America virtually collapsed during the 1990s, which can be regarded as lost years for Russia–Latin American relations. Russia’s quest for influence in Latin America resumed in 1997 when Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov visited Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil. Russia’s quest for influence and political space throughout Latin America and its goals in the region have been remarkably consistent. Russia started envisioning Latin America as an area of increasing global economic-political presence no later than 2003 and began selling weapons to these countries in 2004, so current policy actions represent a continuity and expansion from an earlier base, not a new policy.⁷

During 2000–2011, presidents of Russia visited Latin America six times, and foreign ministers—more than six times. In 2008–9, Russia substantially intensified its presence in Latin America. Presidential and ministerial visits to and from Russia, major arms trade, energy deals, visits by Russian long-range bombers, joint naval exercises with Venezuela, and fleet calls to Nicaragua and Cuba occurred.

Since then major visits have continued, with President Vladimir Putin’s July 2014 tour being the latest example.

Geopolitics and Russian Perceptions of Latin America Since 2003

After 2003 and the steady decline of prospects for a rapprochement with Washington, the dominance of geopolitics emerged quite strongly in Russian foreign policy toward Latin America in general and particularly toward its main regional partners, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba. Russia’s interests were fundamentally geostrategic, not economic (except for the key energy and arms sales lobbies discussed below), and no Latin American economy save perhaps Brazil could offer much tangible benefit to Russia. This may be changing now with the advent of crippling Western sanctions in tandem with collapsing energy prices, which have obliged Moscow to look to Latin America for enhanced trade in foodstuffs. The newly reported arms exchange or leasing of SU-24s (which are really old Soviet fighters) to Argentina in return for Argentine food exports exemplifies the way in which Moscow can trade arms for food without spending foreign currency reserves.⁸ Therefore, geopolitical and strategic aims outweighed and still trump economic interaction with these states. Similarly, Latin American governments’ importance for Moscow grew as its ties with Washington deteriorated. As Boris Martynov, deputy head of the Institute of Latin America at the Russian Academy of Sciences, observed,

The major field of Russia’s collaboration with Latin American countries is not even the economy, but policy and security. Please, pay attention to the fact that all recently signed documents between Russia and these countries confirm similar approaches and unity in positions on the most relevant problems of the global economy and geopolitics. And this is very valuable, especially now, when Russia lacks allies.⁹

At the same time, Russia’s ability to obtain meaningful influence and a truly strategic position in Latin America is a direct function of its capacity for undertaking large-scale foreign policy initiatives beyond its periphery.

What has changed since 2003, then, is Moscow’s capability to act on behalf of those goals and the ever-increasing anti-Americanism of its policies. As Russian journalist Leonid Radzikhovskiy wrote, “the existential void of our politics has been filled entirely by anti-Americanism,” and to renounce this rhetoric “would be tantamount to destroying the foundations of the state ideology.”¹⁰ If anything, that factor in Russian policy has grown steadily since 2012, even before the invasion of Ukraine, and has become one of the most powerful if not the most powerful driving force in Russian foreign policy. Military and political leaders, even before the invasion of Ukraine, concluded years ago that the

United States is Russia's main military-political threat and that Washington was trying to undermine the Russian Federation from within while threatening it from without.¹¹

Moscow continues to seek expanded presence and influence in Latin America. President Dmitry Medvedev, during his tour of Latin America in November–December 2008, said that Russia was only *beginning* to upgrade its ties with Latin America, which he and his subordinate officials recognized as a growing presence in world affairs.¹² He further emphasized that Russia would be engaging in comprehensive and multidimensional relations with Latin America. Indeed, Medvedev even called relations with Latin American countries privileged relations, just like Russia's relations with member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).¹³ Medvedev also urged the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) to promote a genuine multipolarity and weaken U.S. hegemony in international financial institutions and the global economic order.¹⁴ Medvedev and subordinate officials urged Brazil to coordinate foreign policy with Russia to foster the creation of a multipolar world.¹⁵ Medvedev also conceded that his 2008 trip to Latin America was prompted by serious geopolitical reasons.¹⁶ Other subsequent high-ranking trips may be presumed to have had a similar orientation.

Accordingly, the geopolitical element in these ties has consistently been Moscow's paramount consideration. In 2008–9, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called Latin America and Russia natural partners, not because of Latin America's economic growth, but because of the congruence between Latin American governments' foreign policies and Russia's attempt to bring them into its anti-American concept of a multipolar world.¹⁷ Similarly, then–Prime Minister Vladimir Putin remarked that “Latin America is becoming a noticeable link in the chain of the multipolar world that is forming—we will pay more and more attention to this vector of our economic and foreign policy.”¹⁸ Just before his July 2014 trip to Latin America, Putin announced that cooperation with Latin America is a “key and very promising line of Russian foreign policy” and explicitly tied Russia's interest in Latin America to a shared devotion to the principle of versatility in world affairs (i.e., multipolarity), respect for international law (i.e., opposition to unilateral Western interventions abroad), and combating the glorification of Nazism (i.e., East European nationalism against Russia).¹⁹ In May 2014 Lavrov confirmed that Russia's interest in Latin America is an important element of forming “a fairer, more democratic and polycentric system of world order.” Other senior officials have explained that Russia is “actively exploring the arena of interaction with integration associations on the continent.”²⁰ More overtly, Russian analysts attributed Putin's visit and heightened interest in Latin America to a desire to show that Russia is not just a regional power, to counterbalance the United States, and to enhance ties with countries that are keen to declare their independence from American

influence. Putin and the Russian government also noted that Russia's partners in Latin America, which include Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, along with five other Latin American governments, either opposed or abstained on the UN resolution condemning Russian policies in Ukraine.²¹

Although Russia has shown particular attention to Venezuela and Cuba, as discussed below, Moscow's purposes in engaging Latin America economically and diplomatically have developed from Primakov's original 1997 concept concerning his visits to Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Costa Rica. During that trip he signed several bilateral agreements, but when queried concerning the purpose of his visit Primakov replied,

Russia was and still is a great power. As a great power or one of the main players in the international arena, Russia, naturally, should have multilateral ties with all continents, with all regions of the world.²²

In a 2001 telegram to participants in a conference on Latin America, Putin wrote,

Russia believes that it is important to create political dialogue and economic links with Latin America. We are convinced that the construction of this will be mutually beneficial for our peoples and strengthen links in science, education, and culture.²³

Finally in 2006 Lavrov wrote,

In recent years, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean Basin (LACB) occupy an increasingly noticeable place in the system of contemporary international relations. Our contacts with them, representing a separate thrust in Russian foreign policy, integrally blend into the fabric of global and interregional cooperation and are an important component of the international efforts of Russia in tackling the problems common to the entire world community, in combating new challenges and threats, in maintaining strategic stability and reinforcing security.²⁴

In other words, the quest for great power status vis-à-vis Washington, and the effort to create a so-called multipolar world that constrains American ability to upset Moscow's concept of global and regional strategic stability, drive Russian policy. Toward those ends, Russia uses economic contacts in areas of comparative advantage (energy arms sales, space launches, sales of nuclear reactors, possibly power engineering) to leverage political support for Russian positions in world politics and against American interests. This program of action still drives Russian foreign policy for both the region as a whole and for individual countries.²⁵ Accordingly, Russian interest in recovering or gaining positions in Latin America that it either had lost due to the collapse of the USSR or could regain in a changed world order, preceded the more recent notion that this will show the United States that if it intervenes in the CIS,

Moscow can reciprocate in Latin America. And while anti-Americanism was already a major factor driving Russian foreign policy in 2008, it has, if anything, strengthened since at least 2012, when the “reset” policy fell apart and Russo-American relations deteriorated further.

Already in 2008, Moscow advanced ideas concerning the future of Latin America that comported with its own foreign policy ideology and aimed to reduce the reach of U.S. power into this continent. Specifically, Russia asserted the following principles:

- Latin America should be a region of peace that is impervious to outside efforts to induce violent challenges to security and that respects the principles of international law as established in the charters of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN).
- any initiative for the employment of joint forces (with the United States and with other states) must be undertaken in the spirit of compliance with the UN. Integration initiatives must similarly be based on shared multilateral objectives. This also means opposition to unilateral operations involving the use of force.²⁶

Consequently, Moscow’s policy is part of its larger effort, as Lavrov observed, to bring into being a so-called multipolar world where Russia acts to support a series of leveraged regional actors and blocks American unilateralism both on general and on specific issues of interest to those blocs and Russia. In November 2008 Lavrov revealed Moscow’s motives when he stated,

I want to stress that Russia welcomes the developing of democratization and increased attention to the task of national development that we see in Latin America. We welcome Latin America’s role in the efforts to democratize international relations in the context of the objectively growing multipolarity in the world. We believe that these processes are in the interests of the whole [of] mankind. Russia is interested in the closest cooperation with our Latin American partners in reply to the reciprocal interest they are showing.²⁷

Subsequent statements follow on this basis. Russia does have genuine interests in Latin America. But Russia’s commercial interests are very much a means to securing the ends, which are its geopolitical interests. Especially as regards Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, those strategic interests aim at countering U.S. influence in Latin America. Whether visiting the region or hosting Latin American officials in Moscow, Russian officials take every opportunity to make rhetorical declarations on a congruence or identity of interests with their interlocutors on current issues in world politics. Moscow openly and unreservedly

views Latin America as an area of increasing economic and geopolitical importance where it can make gains in fostering the advent of its “multipolar world.”

Moscow’s policy is part of its larger effort to realize this multipolar world. In 2010 Russian leaders traveling in Latin America, such as Sergei Mironov, Speaker of the Federation Council, stated that Russia is interested in establishing a strategic partnership with Latin America.²⁸ While he was not the first to make this observation, it highlighted the growing role that Latin America occupies in Russian foreign policy thinking. In December 2013 Foreign Minister Lavrov described Russia’s rising interest in Latin America.

Latin America is very interesting. This is a swiftly developing region, which wants to be independent more and more. We value this a lot, because we observe independence in international affairs quite rarely—only few countries can afford it. The region certainly becomes one of centers of economic growth, financial power, political influence, and forming multipolar world order. This region is very prospective, its countries are attuned with Russia in what concerns their approaches to international affairs (these approaches are attuned with China as well) on the basis of respect for international law and the UN, non-acceptance of forceful methods of settlement of conflicts and crises, exclusively on the basis of political and diplomatic methods of resolving different international problems. This is what we have in common. This political closeness creates mutual interest to strengthen economic and cultural ties on these grounds.²⁹

Since then Russian policy has kept pace with Lavrov’s remarks. Recently one foreign ministry official said “We are welcoming the trend toward Latin America’s increasing role and influence in international affairs and intend to support it in all ways.”³⁰ Since these allegedly commonly held viewpoints represent all the points on which Moscow regularly accuses Washington of foreign policy dereliction, it is clear that what Moscow values most is the possibility of weakening the United States in its “backyard” and eroding the United States’ ability to manage a regional and even global order. One can go even farther and observe that Russian interest in Latin America correlates inversely with its ties to the United States. As U.S.–Russia ties deteriorate, Russia’s interest in Latin America as an area where it can make gains increases commensurately. Russian policy in Latin America is ultimately an American or anti-American policy. Russia aims to instrumentalize the region as a series of countries or even a weak but still discernible political bloc to support Russian positions against U.S. dominance in world affairs. Latin America supposedly is an increasingly important region in global politics, indeed one of the poles of the multipolar order.³¹

Moscow also now seeks Latin American support for its priority foreign policy goals, for example, the Eurasian Union and the invasion of Ukraine. Thus it has solicited such support and publicly welcomed it when offered. For

example, Moscow has welcomed what it calls Chile's understanding of Russia's stance regarding Ukraine and its desire to sign a free trade accord with the Eurasian Economic Union.³² More recently, Russia and Venezuela have discussed, albeit to no avail, ways of keeping oil prices higher than they are now.³³ But it still remains the case that, except for these dimensions of official policy, Moscow has neither a vision for Latin America nor any means for or interest in developing or implementing one, beyond fostering its distancing from U.S. influence. One searches in vain for any Russian official vision of Latin America's future development other than that it enhance its independence from Washington.

Consequently, Russia's involvement with Latin America is essentially irrelevant to any of Latin America's profound security challenges. This striking omission provides a key to Moscow's policies. Russia's primary objectives there apply to the United States, not to Latin America. Therefore, we can attribute two primary goals to Russian policy here beyond the obvious one of profiting from energy deals, trade, and arms sales. Fundamentally, Russia aims to weaken U.S. positions in Latin America and thus globally force it to reckon with Russia. Essentially, here as elsewhere, a primary goal is to persuade local governments and Washington to accept Russia's status as a global player whose views must be reckoned with as a factor that either restrains or constrains Washington's global actions. Second, it seeks a permanent position in energy, arms sales, and other economic sectors and in military bases from which it can spread its influence and challenge America in the Western hemisphere.

Just as Russia sought bases and an anti-American alliance in 2008 in Latin America, so too does it now seek naval bases, clearly announcing its search for naval bases in Cuba and possibly talking to Argentina and Nicaragua as well.³⁴ Although Foreign Minister Lavrov denied that Russia seeks or needs bases, he did admit that it wants "repair and maintenance stations" for its ocean-going fleet. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, however, observed that Moscow not only wanted the use of ports for its ships but also installations for the refueling of its long-range bombers, which are hardly taking pleasure trips to Latin America.³⁵ Thus Antonov's attempts to reiterate Lavrov's evasive remarks is unlikely to deceive anyone about what Russia is seeking here.³⁶ Moscow may also be looking for a base in Bolivia, which has apparently offered one for use by Russia's air force.³⁷

These policies are directed from the very top of the Russian state. Igor Sechin, the second most powerful member of the government and a long-time Putin confidant, probably oversees Latin American policy and his objectives are openly anti-American. In 2008, Putin sent Sechin and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev to Cuba to discuss resuming bilateral cooperation. Given Patrushev's position, this could only mean defense cooperation. In the

event, Cuba refused to bite because these plans were publicly announced without consulting it in advance, further evidence that they served interests other than those of Russian state policy.³⁸ Cuba's foreign minister even denied any knowledge of the Russian plan for deploying military sites there and Fidel Castro publicly praised Raul Castro's restraint in refusing to be provoked by Moscow or by the U. S. Air Force chief of staff, General Norton Schwartz, who said that such a base would be crossing a red line.³⁹

Indeed, the Russian press reported that not only did Sechin further economic deals and arms sales to Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, he also discussed with them the formation of an anti-American alliance. "Moscow considers the formation of such a union a worthy response to U.S. activity in the former Soviet Union and the placement of missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic."⁴⁰ Not surprisingly Sechin reported to Putin that Moscow should upgrade its relations with these countries in particular and Latin America in general.⁴¹ Since then Moscow has clearly announced its search for naval bases in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua and may be talking to Argentina and Bolivia as well.⁴² Sechin has led Russian delegations to Venezuela and Nicaragua many times since 2008. In 2013 he negotiated the energy deals by which Moscow retained its place in Venezuela after Hugo Chavez's death and strengthened its position in Nicaragua as a potentially more stable or reliable base for its activities.

In April 2014, Russian legislators approved draft legislation to set up a satellite navigation monitoring system in Nicaragua. "Under the agreement, Russia would set up a network of land-based control stations in the Latin American country to monitor and augment the accuracy of navigation satellites in Earth orbit."⁴³ In reality, this base will probably become a substitute for the electronic tracking center at Lourdes, Cuba, that Moscow gave up in a decade ago and enhance Russia's GLONASS (Global Navigation Satellite System). At the same time Nicaragua is again turning to Moscow to modernize its armed forces.⁴⁴ R. Evan Ellis of the Army War College, in a forthcoming study, observes:

Analysts have also speculated that Russian interest in providing security for the construction of the Nicaragua Canal, as well as ongoing Nicaraguan authorization of Russians to temporarily station forces and conduct counter-narcotics operations in the country could be de facto steps toward establishment of a permanent military presence in the country.⁴⁵

As in Venezuela, Moscow sought to forge an anti-American and anti-Colombian alliance among these "usual suspects" in 2008–9. Now that the International Court of Justice awarded Nicaragua another 100,000 miles of territorial waters in 2012, it is trying to assert its sovereignty against Colombia.⁴⁶ So presumably, once again, arms sales and

political support will be directed against a key American ally in Latin America. Here too we see the predominance of the geopolitical factor whereby arms sales are an instrument to achieve positive political gains in an unrelated sector.

Nevertheless while Russia will seek wherever possible to expand its ties to Latin American countries, Russia's capacities for deep involvement here are less than it wants, as are some Latin American states' capacity for support of Russia. This is especially true for countries like Venezuela that depend on energy or commodities revenues, as their capabilities have also been diminished due to the global economic crisis and falling energy prices. Indeed, as of this writing, Venezuela is on the verge of state failure. Moreover, the crippling impact of Russia's own economic slowdown and the impact of Western sanctions will severely affect Russia's capacities for any kind of robust economic action in Latin America. Therefore it is likely that the expectations of support from Russia for Latin American economies will only be partly met at best.⁴⁷ So it is not surprising that even in Caracas, there was skepticism about Russia's ability to expand its ties to Venezuela, which mainly comprise arms sales, into a relationship based on large-scale investment and diplomatic coordination.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, some of the more improvident Latin American states like Argentina still seek credits from Russia for major infrastructural projects like Chihuido Dam.⁴⁹

Latin American states for their part have practical motives for cooperating with Russia, namely the lure or hope of obtaining tangible material benefits from Moscow. At the same time Latin American countries also benefit thereby. Not only do they gain exposure to a large and growing market, they also achieve their own economic and geostrategic aims. Nicaragua's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 stemmed from its hope of gaining Russian military and economic assistance to replace its aging arsenal of Soviet weapons, and not just President Daniel Ortega's lingering anti-Americanism.⁵⁰ Similarly, Cuba's continuing interest in strengthened ties with Russia owes much to its continuing need for Russian assistance. Cuba has all along been motivated, at least in part, by its prior dependence upon Moscow and its economic largesse. Therefore it has called for utilizing all possibilities for developing trade and economic cooperation and a return "to the former level of relations."⁵¹ Indeed, it obtained a loan from Moscow in early 2009 for \$20 million and has expressed continuing interest in strengthening its ties.⁵² Cuba undoubtedly is also pleased with Russia's support for ending U.S. sanctions and typically overt efforts to claim credit preemptively for President Barack Obama's policy of ending the diplomatic boycott and embargo. Thus Lavrov used this issue to signal support for Cuba and parade Moscow's support for the UN and the "international community's pressure on Washington to terminate the sanctions."⁵³ Nevertheless the economic leg of Russia's ties to Latin America remains stunted and will likely remain inadequate

to the task of Russian foreign policy for the foreseeable future.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The key instruments of Russian foreign policy in Latin America, as elsewhere, are arms sales, energy deals, and large-scale investments in areas where Moscow may have a competitive capability, for example, in power or nuclear engineering. In all these cases the purposes are, first, to advance Russian geopolitical goals, and second, to enrich key sectors of the Russian government and economy whose leaders are connected to the state. For example, Russia has long wanted to take part in a projected gas pipeline from Argentina to Bolivia, as well as other key energy projects with Venezuela and other states.⁵⁴ This unity of arms sales, military installations, and large-scale economic, energy, and infrastructural projects is a hallmark of Russian policy. These are the instruments by which Moscow seeks to permanently leverage "friendly states" into partners or, more bluntly, clients. The process is already well advanced in Nicaragua and in Venezuela. In 2006 then-Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov admitted that successful business contacts are crucial to Russia's geopolitical cooperation with other governments when he said, "I would not set higher targets for geopolitical relations without making a success in the economy first."⁵⁵ Russia has offered Latin American governments deals with respect to oil, gas, nuclear energy, uranium mining, electricity generation, weapons sales, high-tech defense technology, agriculture, and cooperation with respect to space. Arms sales, given their nature, have a particularly prominent place in this agenda.

Thus, Patrushev in 2008 told Ecuador's government that Russia wanted to collaborate with its intelligence agency, "to expand Moscow's influence in Latin America."⁵⁶ Moscow also signed an agreement to sell Ecuador weapons.⁵⁷ Russia's ambitions to penetrate Latin American intelligence organizations has continued since then. Russia has openly advocated increased cooperation among intelligence services of BRIC members and Latin American states in general. Clearly Moscow wants to use those contacts as bases for political influence to support those states and potential insurgent movements against the United States.⁵⁸ In 2008 Russia most likely wanted to link Ecuador and Venezuela with Russian weapons and intelligence support against Colombia, support the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia) guerrilla movement, threaten a U.S. ally, and pin Washington down in another dirty war.⁵⁹ Since we know that Moscow sold billions of dollars' worth of weapons to Venezuela, many of which the late Hugo Chavez then offered the FARC to destabilize Colombia and possibly other governments, Moscow's fingerprints here are pretty clear. Indeed, Venezuela's massive arms

purchases from Moscow and other suppliers amounted to possibly over \$15 billion and aroused considerable concern in Latin America.⁶⁰ Viktor Bout's case reinforces this analysis. Bout's 2008 arrest for running guns to the FARC coincided with Russia's overt effort to inflame Latin America in a further internal and external conflict involving Venezuelan and Ecuadorian support for the FARC against Colombia.⁶¹ Moreover, immediately after Bout's arrest, Moscow lobbied intensely to get him back. His connections to the Russian military intelligence directorate (GRU) and the Russian government are well known. Neither is Bout the only international arms broker involved in running weapons to the FARC or other Latin American criminal, insurgent, and terrorist groups.⁶² But clearly, Russian interests in intelligence penetration have not ended despite Bout's failure.

These arms sales have created a dangerous potential for instability throughout Latin America. Indeed, the scope of those sales makes no sense unless Moscow seeks an arms race in Latin America. Chilean, Colombian, and especially Brazilian reports have long since raised the specter of Venezuela "detonating" a continental arms race, acquiring the largest Latin American fleet due to its purchase of submarines, the comprehensive arming of Venezuela's army, fleet, and air forces with huge arms purchases, and the acquisition of hundreds of thousands of Kalashnikovs as well as an ammunition factory. These reports also point out that since 2003, if not earlier, these weapons (automatic rifles, ammunition, etc.) have migrated from Venezuela to the FARC. This fuels the fear that Russian arms will underwrite armed insurgencies and drug running (submarines being excellently equipped for that purpose), rather than the defense of Venezuela's coastline from nonexistent threats.⁶³ Indeed, Venezuela accounted for \$11 billion of the \$14.5 billion in arms sales to Latin America from 2001 to 2013. Virtually every country in the region has Russian helicopters. The MI-17 transport helicopter in particular accounts for 42 percent of the region's military helicopter fleet, with 409 of them being currently in service.⁶⁴

In addition, Moscow undoubtedly was fully aware of President Hugo Chavez's conversion of Venezuela into a critical trans-shipment center for narcotics from both Latin America and West Africa, his support for insurgencies and terrorists throughout Latin America, and his expansionist and revolutionary dreams about Colombia and sought to exploit those factors for its own anti-American purposes.⁶⁵ Indeed, reports since 2003 point to Russian criminal penetration of Mexico's narcotics gangs.⁶⁶ In early 2009 a Russian and a Cuban citizen were arrested for drug smuggling in Yucatan.⁶⁷ Thus, claims that Moscow is aiding efforts by Nicaragua and other states to combat drug trafficking cannot be taken at face value.⁶⁸ Indeed, as noted above, there are signs that Nicaragua is replacing Venezuela as Russia's key military partner in Latin America as Venezuela's domestic crisis intensifies. Nicaragua's canal

concessions allow for a military base there and many suspect Moscow wants it as a base from which it could launch covert operations, beyond the existing desire for a naval and/or air base. Nicaragua is also conducting joint-anti-narcotics patrols with Russia and hosting a Russian satellite monitoring station for GLONASS. Moscow has also provided cash, armored vehicles, helicopters, training facilities, and officer education programs for Nicaragua.⁶⁹ This relationship exemplifies the commingling of terrorism, insurgency, criminality, and foreign sponsorship to undermine existing governments and U.S. partners and allies.⁷⁰ It was recently reported, for example, that Russian anti-armor bullets were being used by Central American criminals.⁷¹

But the scope of Moscow's continuing efforts to sell arms to Latin America goes well beyond such cases. For years, Russian weapons exporters have seen Latin America as a potential market for their wares, at first through the modernization of existing weapons but moving more recently to offering new products to all governments. Russia publicly claimed that the Bush Administration's policies had "created a situation that Russian arms manufacturers see as a kind of present." Potential customers became alarmed that their own position had become insecure, and therefore they sought more and newer weapons.⁷² At the same time Russian defense firms still need foreign income to sustain them, and many evidently depend on arms sales to survive. Arms sales and energy deals, as well as the search for military bases and lasting political influence, all go together in Russian foreign policy. Russia frequently uses its military exports to obtain extraction rights in resource-rich areas. Anatoly Isaikin, the chief of Russia's arms sales agency Rosoboronekспорт, stated,

It is true that negotiations on the development of some mineral resources are conducted more often than not with Russian investors. These may be any firms, any enterprises that are interested in extracting oil, for instance. We simply need to understand we are not alone in this big wide world. That various countries' natural resources are of interest to a great many states, China in particular. The very fiercest competition is underway for the right to develop mineral resources in African countries.⁷³

The fact that the head of Russia's military export organization is making such a comment publicly speaks volumes. The primary point, of course, is that he sees his organization as an integral part of Russia's efforts to gain access to mineral-rich areas, thus confirming the linkage between these two aspects of Russian policy. Moreover, Moscow is clearly targeting Peru and Brazil for arms sales in order to move them away from their close ties to, if not previous dependence on, U.S. defense producers and Washington in general.⁷⁴ In Peru, Moscow is negotiating new aircraft and helicopter deals as well as technology transfer and joint production. Meanwhile Peru has already bought 24 MI-

171 helicopters from Moscow.⁷⁵ Brazil has bought 12 MI-35 helicopters and is negotiating a major deal for armored personnel carriers. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin is advocating a defense partnership with Brazil.⁷⁶ Beyond these deals and negotiations, Russian arms exporters expect the Latin American arms market to reach a value of \$50 billion by 2025 and may have already become the largest suppliers of military equipment to Latin American countries, outstripping the United States perhaps as early as 2009. The funds Moscow received were, in about half of Venezuela's deals (\$2 billion), converted into agreements giving Russian enterprises equity in Venezuelan oil and gas fields.⁷⁷

NICARAGUA AND VENEZUELA

As this last example suggests, Moscow uses its ability to lend money and sell arms to countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, which are ruled by Chavez-type regimes, or Nicaragua, with its long-standing Sandinista regime, to gain their assent to its political agenda or to obtain a long-term security position there. Thus arms sales not only enhance direct contact with the recipient's armed forces but also open the door to a broader relationship. Nicaragua is a case in point, especially as it may now be supplanting the increasingly unstable Venezuela as the main center of Russian activities in Latin America.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega claimed that he was turning to Russia, just as he had done a generation ago, because Washington offered nothing to Nicaragua despite requests for military and other aid. On Lavrov's most recent trip to Managua, Nicaragua reiterated its support for Moscow's policies in Ukraine, denounced U.S. sanctions, and evoked the congruence of Russo-Nicaraguan views concerning a desirable global order.⁷⁸ Allegedly, Nicaragua is particularly concerned about the threat of drug running. And there is no doubt that Moscow collaborates with Managua and potentially other countries like Ecuador on counter-drug operations, providing weapons and trainers and conducting exercises with Nicaragua.⁷⁹ But given the incorporation of much of Russian organized crime into the state, it is unlikely that it is helping Nicaragua and other Latin American states only with counter-drug activities.⁸⁰

Neither has Russian meddling stopped there. Indeed, for the first time, Russia has linked up with China on a major commercial project, namely their discussion on joint participation in a long-held dream of a trans-oceanic canal through Nicaragua. Formally, the Chinese businessman Wang Jing owns the concession, but there is speculation he may grant Russia the concession for security of the canal or that something larger might be in the offing. Opposition deputy Eliseo Nunez Morales has observed that Wang Jing also holds a concession for a deep-water port in Crimea and that the planned canal does not have a declaration of

neutrality, suggesting that in the event of a conflict it would not remain neutral. Moreover, the legal framework of the canal concession allows for the establishment of a military base. In that case, granting Russia the security concession could be a cover for military base. And a construction or military base project meanwhile also affords excellent cover for the introduction of a host of covert agents and programs and for laundering criminally obtained profits. Therefore, Ortega's conservative opponents suspect, not without reason, that this is a cover for a Russian base.⁸¹ Another deputy, Victor Hugo Tinoco, observed that Nicaragua's Great Canal Law "serves to carry out business without paying taxes"; in other words, it provides a platform for corruption of the project and the government by Russian if not also Chinese money. Thus, former government officials and opposition figures publicly have articulated their fears that Ortega might turn Nicaragua into a Russian base of operations.⁸² The recent evidence of potentially large-scale natural gas deposits in the Caribbean near Nicaragua will undoubtedly stoke Russian interests even more than in the past.⁸³

Beyond Nicaragua, Russia is constantly pushing arms sales to virtually every Latin American state in order to gain an entrée from which it can then exert influence. In all cases, Russia seeks lasting bases of influence, military power projection, and creation of a network of partnerships to thwart U.S. policies using overt diplomatic and covert means. Venezuela is a case in point and also highlights the linkages between arms deals and energy access. Since 2004 Venezuela has reached deals to buy billions of dollars of arms from Russia, including Sukhoi fighter jets, combat helicopters, and over 100,000 light weapons, primarily the famous AK-103 assault rifles and a license to produce them in Venezuela.⁸⁴ There were also earlier discussions about selling Project 636 submarines (among the quietest subs in the world) to Venezuela during 2011–13 along with torpedo and missile ordnance for Venezuela's navy. As part of his anti-Colombian campaign, Chavez also obtained a new loan of \$2.2 billion from Moscow with which to buy more arms, despite the depressed oil market, in return for recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and giving Moscow more access to oil projects in the Orinoco river basin. This shows the link between Russian arms sales, bases, the Caucasus, and energy policies. The \$2.2 billion loan in 2009 was spent on 92 T-70 and T-72 tanks, BMP-3 Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Smerch anti-tank missiles, multiple rocket launchers, S-300, Buk M-2, and Pechora anti-aircraft missiles, all systems usable against Colombia. In return, Russia got access to join Venezuela's oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)*, in exploring oil fields in the Orinoco river basin.⁸⁵ And arms sales have continued since then.⁸⁶

Venezuela's arms purchases are intended for purposes of helping the FARC and other, similar groups, fighting Colombia, power projection throughout Latin America,

drug running with submarines and protection of them against air attacks, or providing a temporary base and infrastructure for Russian naval and air forces where they can be sheltered from attacks and can threaten North or South America.⁸⁷ Prime Minister Putin said that permanent bases in Cuba and Venezuela were unnecessary, leaving the door open to temporary bases, including submarine bases as needed.⁸⁸ But now the Russian navy has openly announced its quest for permanent bases in Latin America.⁸⁹

Furthermore, building on its long-standing “strategic partnership” with Venezuela, dating back to Hugo Chavez’s rule, Moscow continues to coordinate its foreign policies with Caracas. Russian arms sales to Venezuela formed a strong basis, and more recently, Russia’s growing involvement in Venezuela’s oil industry only seemed to have deepened ties. Following Chavez’s death in 2013, continuity has prevailed, with Chavez’s appointed successor, Nicolas Maduro, agreeing to pledge to continue cooperation. Maduro stressed the economic and strategic importance of the relationship. Russia also moved very fast to capitalize on Venezuelan oil, with Rosneft and PDVSA (the Venezuelan equivalent) forming a partnership to exploit a Venezuelan oil field within two weeks of Chavez’s death.

Other deals have followed since then. In January 2013, Russian oil giant Rosneft, led by Igor Sechin, announced \$10 billion of investment in Venezuelan energy projects, where Sechin’s company will be the leader of a consortium of Russian energy firms.⁹⁰ By July 2013, after a presidential visit by Maduro, Russia and Venezuela announced that they had concluded 240 economic agreements in energy and other fields. And Russian trade and investments in Venezuela are clearly growing as well.⁹¹ Bilateral Russian investments in energy alone total \$21 billion and permit the certification of Venezuela as the world’s fifth-largest gas reserve. So it is clear that Russia is ensuring a long-term major stake in Venezuelan energy development and, through that stake, a window on energy projects throughout Latin America.⁹² Moreover, a new deal was apparently signed at the bilateral presidential talks, indicating investment in unexplored parts of Venezuela’s continental shelf and possibly moving into the new area of gas and condensate extraction.⁹³

But there is much more to this relationship than Sechin’s desire to secure Rosneft’s leadership in Venezuelan energy and major trade and investment programs. Moscow’s arms sales agency, Rosoboronexport, announced that it had fulfilled 90 percent of its existing military contracts with Venezuela, including the major deals announced in 2012. Now, both sides will move to ensure after-sale maintenance of those weapons.⁹⁴ President Vladimir Putin also observed that “international issues” took on a prominent role in his talks with Maduro. One such issue might be Maduro’s stated interest to reshape MERCOSUR (the Common Market of the South), to associate it with the BRICS and move it in an anti-liberal,

state-led direction—a trend that would likely strengthen Russia’s connections to this economic bloc.⁹⁵ Moreover, Maduro and Putin both agreed on the need to maintain the relationship in military affairs to preserve “the same rhythm,” suggesting discussions about new arms sales.⁹⁶

Building on its long-standing “strategic partnership” with Venezuela, Moscow continues to coordinate its foreign policies with Caracas. On a recent visit to Moscow by Venezuela’s foreign minister, Russian diplomats stated that,

The two states call for forming a more equitable multi-polar world order based on the supremacy of international law, with the UN playing a more coordinating role in maintaining global peace and security. — Russia and Venezuela develop the productive practice of coordinating their positions within the UN framework and at other international organizations.⁹⁷

The reporting on this visit also emphasized that both states share a common opinion on the Ukrainian crisis, “and make consistent calls for settling the situation in Syria and around the Iranian nuclear program solely through political and diplomatic methods and asserting through political and diplomatic methods truly democratic principles in international relations, including the human rights area.”⁹⁸ During the May 2014 meetings with Venezuelan ministers in Moscow, Moscow clearly intimated that it would expand “military-technical cooperation,” that is, arms sales, training and education programs for Venezuelan officers, and joint exercises, in return for increased opportunities for its navy and air force to use Venezuelan bases and facilities.⁹⁹ Similarly, Moscow has increased economic aid, gas and oil projects, and support, including opposition to U.S. calls for sanctions on Venezuela due to the government’s attempts to repress the large opposition movement, in return for Venezuela’s continuing support for “a pluripolar and multi-central world.” (as translated in the original).¹⁰⁰ Since all this conforms to Moscow’s agenda but omits any discussion of Latin American security issues, it demonstrates who calls the shots in this relationship and the corresponding lack of any serious Russian concern for Latin American developments.

INDIVIDUAL BILATERAL RELATIONS: CUBA, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL

Cuba was Russia’s ally during the Cold War. The end of the Cold War forced a general reduction if not withdrawal of Russian influence. Russia reduced its cooperation with Cuba to a bare minimum. But Vladimir Putin’s presidency furnished an opportunity for gradually revitalizing Moscow–Havana relations. In 2000, Putin visited and granted Castro a 50 million U.S.-dollar credit, after which trade links between Cuba and Russia increased. But Putin closed

the controversial Russian radar station in Cuba in 2001. In 2003, Russia also shut down the radio-electronic surveillance center in Lourdes, which allowed Russia to eavesdrop on telephone calls, satellite flights, and emails across the United States. Those decisions were clearly connected to the efforts to forge a rapprochement with Washington in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks.

But by 2008 Russian policy had clearly turned to an anti-American direction. President Medvedev's visit to Havana in November 2008 marked the beginning of a new stage in Russian–Cuban relations. In January 2009, Cuban President Raul Castro visited Moscow, the first visit by a Cuban head of state in 25 years. Numerous agreements were signed. We also see a revival of ongoing talks between Russian and Cuban military officials, for example, Sechin's trips in 2008 and renewed discussions on security cooperation with Cuba.¹⁰¹ Thus, Russia has pledged to continue military-technological cooperation (arms sales) with Cuba.¹⁰² Russian officials continue to assign Cuba a key role in Russian foreign policy and consider it a permanent partner in Latin America.¹⁰³ The Viktor Leonov CCB-175, an armed intelligence-gathering vessel built for the Soviet navy in the late 1980s, quietly arrived at a cruise ship terminal in Havana on February 27, 2014. The Russian spy ship also visited Havana in September 2012. The port call came the same day Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia would establish permanent bases in Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Singapore, and the Seychelles islands off the east coast of Africa.¹⁰⁴

Argentina presents another example of Russian policy. Here too, Moscow seeks to expand its influence and move Argentina away from the West. Meanwhile, Argentina had its own reasons for seeking closer ties with Moscow, even before its current crisis of bankruptcy and default on its debts to Western creditors, although that certainly adds to the forces driving its policies. Argentina reportedly wishes to escape from excessive reliance upon Venezuela for energy and financial aid by turning to Russia to conduct hydrocarbon explorations in Argentina and offshore. But since no formal agreement between Argentina and Russia has been reached, it remains to be seen to what degree, if at all, these reports are true. Meanwhile Lukoil may provide fuel oil and diesel fuel for thermal power plants in the winter when there tend to be gas shortages. Likewise, Russia will also help construct Argentina's northeast gas pipeline to Bolivia.¹⁰⁵

Putin and Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner also jointly advocated reforming international financial institutions, a major thrust of recent Russian foreign policy during Putin's recent visit, and Russia has pursued arms sales and convergence of diplomatic positions with Argentina against Washington.¹⁰⁶ Moscow also appears to incline favorably to making Argentina a member of the

BRICs, even though its economy cannot in any way justify this invitation or status and Brazil, South Africa, and India have transparently political motives for supporting the invitation.¹⁰⁷ In line with his remarks above, Lavrov visited Argentina in 2013 to discuss

Russian–Argentinian cooperation in the UN Security Council, a non-permanent member of which Argentina is now, in the G20, and also between regional integration associations to which Argentina is part. They will also consider relevant issues on the international agenda, joint actions to strengthen the UN's central role in global affairs, multilateral diplomacy, supremacy of international law, and progress in disarmament and nonproliferation.¹⁰⁸

Although Argentina abstained in the UN vote to condemn the annexation of Crimea, President Kirchner supported Russia's position in return for Russia's support of her position that the Falkland Islands must be returned to Argentina, indicating the progress of their rapprochement and this strategic partnership.¹⁰⁹ While, "the willingness of these Latin American countries to support Russia—in varying degrees of diplomatic language—is an indicator of the limitations of its 'reset' with Latin America," Argentina seems to be drifting toward a more genuine partnership with Russia.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Putin, when in Buenos Aires, announced that Argentina is a "key partner" of Russia.¹¹¹

During concurrent meetings with Argentina's Foreign Minister Hector Timerman, Lavrov essentially traded support for Argentina's claims against Great Britain regarding the Falkland Islands, willingness to consider Argentina's desire to join the BRICS, and "further development of *all areas of our cooperation*" (author's italics) for Argentina's support for a multipolar world and the development of closer ties with Latin American regional integration organizations CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) and MERCOSUR where Argentina is a member. Russia also clearly appreciates Argentina's support for its position on Ukraine and claims that the debates at the UN showed the "overwhelming support" of Latin American governments for that position. Moscow similarly values Argentina's signature of a joint statement to refrain from placing arms in outer space—a Russian plank to obstruct the U.S. missile defense program.¹¹²

The common viewpoint that Argentina, like Russia, opposes double-standard messages—for example, the Western condemnation of the Crimean operation, while the West supported the Falklands referendum of 2013 when the voters reaffirmed their attachment to the United Kingdom—is also well received. So it hardly was a surprise that both foreign ministers agreed that international conflicts would "have a sustainable solution" if political leaders worked to strengthen "a solid multilateral system based on cooperation and mutual collaboration and non-intervention in states"

domestic affairs through economic, political, or military means.”¹¹³ Thus Lavrov observed that

Russia and Argentina share a common approach to the global situation. We are united in believing that the newly developing architecture of international relations must be polycentric and based on the objectively strengthening tenets of economic growth and political influence. We are interested in Latin America becoming one of those centers.¹¹⁴

Readers should again note, however, that in Russian statements, Latin America is always becoming one of these poles rather than actually being one, lest Moscow get trapped by its own rhetoric and then have to take a Latin American viewpoint into serious consideration. Neither should readers think that these remarks about economic cooperation and improving ties with organizations like MERCOSUR and CELAC are just boilerplate. Here again, Moscow has tangible goals in mind. Russia, as Lavrov said, wants to create a legal framework for its contracts in trade, investment, and overall economic activity with MERCOSUR, using Argentina’s support, and it wants to establish “formal relations” between MERCOSUR and the new Eurasian Economic Union in order to give the latter more international standing and clout.¹¹⁵ It may also not be surprising that Russia’s growing interest in Argentina has coincided with the news that it has huge potential shale gas deposits.¹¹⁶

Brazil presents a different picture, because it is on the way to becoming a true great power; it is a member of the BRICS and clearly the strongest Latin American power. Russia fully understands Brazil’s importance as South America’s largest economy and a regional power and seeks much closer economic ties with it. Russia has signed agreements with Brazil to upgrade trade across many economic sectors, including agricultural products, defense cooperation, and space projects, and seeks to increase cooperation with Brazil in all areas.¹¹⁷ Since 2006 Moscow has been pursuing what it calls a “technological alliance” with Brazil, allegedly because together they can initiate world-class technological projects.¹¹⁸ These efforts apparently have benefited Russia politically, as Brazil has been visibly unwilling to condemn Moscow’s policies in Ukraine.¹¹⁹ This outcome will reinforce Russia’s conviction that it has further room for maneuver with Brazil against U.S. interests and that Brazil can become an international political partner as well as a significant trading partner and thus an example to other Latin American countries. But even though economic cooperation bilaterally and through the BRICS (for example, the new BRICS Bank) will continue, it is not likely to reach the level of cooperation we see in the Cuban or even Argentinian cases. As Roberto Mangabeira Unger, Brazil’s Minister of Strategic Affairs, said in 2008,

We are not interested in buying defense products off the shelf. — Unlike other South American countries we don’t go around buying things and we are not interested in some kind of balance of power politics to contain the United States. — We have friendly relations with the United States, and with the incoming administration intend to make them even more friendly.¹²⁰

Notwithstanding Russian blandishments and the Snowden revelations, these sentiments still stand—and not only in Brazil.

CONCLUSIONS

For all of Moscow’s undisputed successes in improving its bilateral connections and relationships with Latin American governments, it is clearly more comfortable dealing with those states on narrow bilateral agendas in order to leverage not a regional vision but a quest for global standing and the corresponding diminution of U.S. power and capability. Ultimately, Russian policy here conforms to Natasha Kuhrt’s observations about Russian policy in Asia—that Russia feels much more at ease at the global level than at the regional one. Perhaps that explains, at least in part, why Russia cannot or at least has not advanced a regional agenda here, where it is much less self-confident.¹²¹ Russia’s Latin American policy also reveals Moscow’s consistent tactic of either inserting Russia or using its geographical proximity to regions in world politics to create a kind of regional bipolarity against U.S. interests and challenge Washington thereby, as a stepping-stone or ladder to an assertion of global multipolarity. It remains the case that Russian interest in Latin America derives from its opposition to Washington, not from an intrinsic grasp of or concern for regional dynamics there.

Nevertheless, we see Moscow seeking, sometimes with success, to achieve the following objectives:

1. Bases for its ships, aircraft, and covert operatives;
2. Havens for money laundering and criminal activities of various kinds;
3. Undermining the desire of key regional actors to cooperate with the United States, either on building coalitions for international security programs or for trade and regional security initiatives;
4. Placing pressure on allies like Colombia,
5. Arming and emboldening anti-American regimes in the area, led by Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, as well as potentially Argentina;
6. Undermining U.S. concepts for multilateral organizations such as the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Systems, while strengthening

counter blocs such as Chavez's "Bolivarian Alliance" (ALBA).

At the same time, Latin America's enhanced capability to meet Russian (and even more critically, Chinese) commercial needs attests to the success of a quiet but successful U. S. policy to promote regional economic capability. Indeed, we also see expressions of concern, even in Nicaragua, lest its turn to Moscow trigger a strong U.S. backlash against Nicaragua.¹²² Nonetheless, there are critical socio-political tensions in the region, and Moscow, as we have seen, eagerly tries to exploit them for its own benefit, as it does elsewhere. While local governments and political actors are necessarily focused on the local outcomes and implications, ultimately this is not Moscow's primary concern in Latin America. Nevertheless, Russia or any other major power that wants to play a leading role here will have to address those issues. Ironically, just as the United States proclaims the end of the Monroe Doctrine, Moscow, if not Beijing, seeks to regenerate the challenges that impelled that doctrine's original creation in 1823.¹²³ Therefore it is worth paying attention to Latin America as an object of Russian policy, not only because it sheds light on Russia's overall objectives vis-a-vis the United States, but also because it reveals some of the abiding dilemmas of Russian policy as Moscow "pivots" to Asia while seeking to build a continental bloc in Eurasia.¹²⁴ Ultimately, what happens in Russo-Latin American relations cannot, probably should not, and almost certainly does not stay in Latin America.

FUNDING

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of the Korean government (NRF 2012S1A3A 2033350).

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