

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BRAZIL IN THE DOMAINS OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE

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ABSTRACT: China has had substantial growth in recent decades, with a primary emphasis on economic development accompanied by significant progress in other sectors including the military, scientific-technological, and psychosocial spheres. This phenomenon has emerged amid the backdrop of structural transformations in the global landscape, resulting in the reevaluation, adjustments, and responses of many nations. The response of the United States to the heightened involvement of China has been of considerable importance within the given framework. The aforementioned reaction has had wide-ranging implications and outcomes within the global framework, and Brazil is not exempt from its effects. Brazil has been obligated to address the ripple effects and implications arising from the conflicts between these two prominent global powers. The primary aim of this essay is to examine the consequences that Brazil may face as a result of the continuous strategic rivalry between the United States and China, with a specific focus on the domains of security and defense.

KEYWORDS: United States of America; China; Brazil; Latin America; Competition; Security; Defense.

I. Introduction

The ongoing strategic struggle between the United States and China is a well-documented topic in academic literature. Scholars from various theoretical perspectives within the field of international relations universally acknowledge the presence of this phenomenon. Extensive scholarly literature, including scientific articles, essays, and discussions, has emerged to explore the implications and effects of this phenomenon on other countries within the international system. These discussions have taken place not only within academic circles but also in specialized media outlets, as well as in governmental and corporate environments.

The occurrence of strategic competition with the United States as a prominent participant is not a recent development, particularly within the Latin American and Caribbean regions. For over two centuries, after the conclusion of the colonial era in the Americas, geopolitical conflicts have arisen between the U.S. and external global powers. The United States has recently recognized China as a new contender challenging its interests in the Western Hemisphere.

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This work will primarily examine the ramifications of this competition for Brazil, particularly in terms of security and defense. A concise overview of the historical dimensions of the subject matter shall be provided before commencement. Subsequently, an exposition of the prevailing positions of the United States and China regarding the region will be provided. In conclusion, this analysis will examine the consequences for Brazil in the context of security and defense.

II. Historical aspects

The United States' focus on the Western Hemisphere has a long history. In 1823, President James Monroe delivered an address to Congress that laid the groundwork for what is commonly known as the "Monroe Doctrine," a policy that asserted the principle of "America for Americans." Upon the attainment of independence by the former European colonies in the Americas, the United States implemented measures to mitigate European influence on the American continent. The United States provided support for the attainment of independence, promptly acknowledging the recently formed governing bodies. This support aimed to diminish the influence of European powers, particularly Spain, France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, while also exerting varying levels of leadership over the emerging nations in the Americas.

The approach implemented in 1898 ultimately resulted in armed conflict between the United States and Spain. The primary catalyst for the conflict arose from Cuba's pursuit of self-governance and liberation from Spanish colonial rule. Following a victory over Spain, the United States gained authority over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. The conflict facilitated the rise of the United States as a global hegemon. The country was provided with the essential prerequisites for the construction of the Panama Canal, facilitating the connection between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This monumental undertaking was successfully accomplished in 1914. Spain has unequivocally relinquished its colonies on the American continent.

The United Kingdom also emerged as a rival to the United States in its pursuit of dominance in the Americas. In the early 1900s, the United States employed diverse strategies of coercive diplomacy in order to diminish the influence of the United Kingdom in the Caribbean basin and secure sole dominion over the pathways for an isthmian canal (Berg & Brands, 2021). In 1895, the United States supported Venezuela during a territorial conflict with Guyana, which was under British colonial rule at the time, contradicting British objectives.

During World War II, the United States effectively influenced Latin American nations to join the Western powers in opposition to the Nazis, fascists, and Japanese forces. Brazil, a country that experienced the sinking of multiple merchant ships in the Atlantic Ocean due to German submarine attacks, actively participated in the war effort. As a testament to their commitment, Brazil deployed an Army Division consisting of over 25,000 soldiers to the European battlefields, making a significant contribution of Brazilian personnel to the ultimate triumph of the Allied forces. The involvement in this activity resulted in a notable strengthening of the bonds between the Brazilian military forces and their counterparts in the United States. The utilization of U.S. doctrine and armaments in combat led to a military accord that endured from the aftermath of the war until the 1970s. During this period, the Brazilian armed forces

embraced the doctrine. They procured systems and materials for military utilization from the United States and its allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The United States led the establishment of three multilateral arrangements, collectively known as the "hemispheric security" architecture, in order to safeguard its interests. These arrangements include the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The Inter-American Development Board (IADB) was founded in 1942. The primary objective of the organization was to "study and recommend the necessary measures for the defense of the continent and act as an organ for the preparation and recommendation for the legitimate collective defense of the American continent against aggression", in response to the imminent danger presented by the Axis powers over the course of World War II. The objective of safeguarding the continent persists in the contemporary era. The current purpose of the IADB is to "provide the Organization of American States and its member states with technical advisory and educational advisory services on issues related to military and defense matters in the hemisphere to contribute to the fulfillment of the OAS charter. The Inter-American Defense College is an educational establishment that operates under the auspices of the IADB. Since its establishment in 1962, the college has successfully conferred degrees on over 3,000 students hailing from 27 countries across the Americas.

The second component comprising continental defense within the hemispheric security architecture is the Treaty of Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), established in 1947 and ratified the subsequent year. The fundamental tenet of the agreement revolves around the notion that any act of aggression directed towards a member state will be regarded as an assault on the collective security of all participants, in accordance with the doctrine commonly referred to as "hemispheric defense." Despite being invoked on a limited number of occasions in history, the invocation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance by Argentina in 1982, coupled with the United States' favorable stance towards the United Kingdom during the Malvinas/Falklands War, engendered significant distrust among several Latin American nations regarding the efficacy of the agreement.

Undoubtedly, the Organization of American States (OAS) stands as the most pertinent entity. Established in 1948, just three years after the formation of the United Nations, this particular entity stands as one of the most ancient regional organizations globally. The charter of the organization has been ratified by all thirty-five sovereign states of the Americas, making them official members of such an organization. In 2009, Cuba was subject to exclusion. Security problems within the organization are addressed by a specialized committee known as the Committee on Hemispheric Security.

Following the conclusion of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the United States assumed a dominant position as a global hegemonic force. Consequently, there was a decrease in the level of American focus and engagement with South America and the Caribbean region. Ultimately, the absence of any potential external contender posing a challenge to the United States' interests within the Western Hemisphere was evident. The aforementioned phenomenon became more pronounced subsequent to the occurrences of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. These events

redirected the focus of the United States towards the well-recognized "war on terror," the Middle East, and Afghanistan.

Remarkably, the year 2001 coincides with China's accession to the World Trade Organization, a highly significant event that played a pivotal role in the remarkable economic expansion witnessed by the nation over the initial two decades of the 21st century.

This phenomenon facilitated the circumstances for a significant and consistent growth in the amount of trade between Brazil and China, ultimately resulting in Brazilian exports to China surpassing Brazilian exports to the United States in 2009. Presently, Brazil's exports to China exceed those to the United States by a factor of almost 2.5.

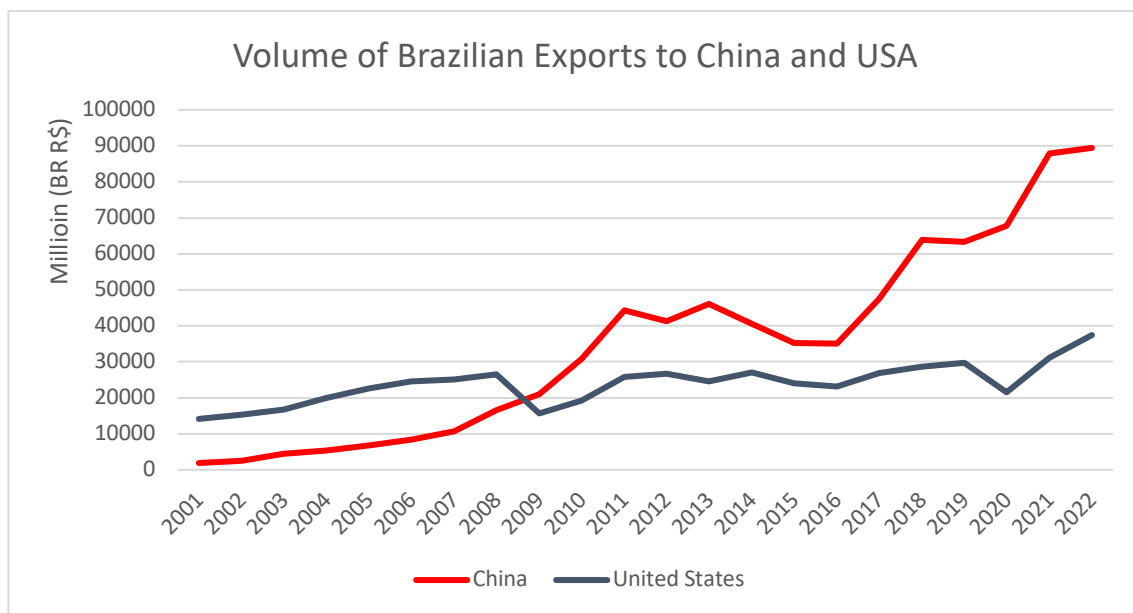


Figure 1 – Brazilian exports to China and U.S. Organization of the author based on the data available in <http://comexstat.mdic.gov.br/pt/geral>

In 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama initiated a significant alteration in his nation's foreign policy, commonly referred to as the "Pivot to East Asia," in response to the ongoing systemic transformations. This strategic shift involved redirecting attention from the Middle East to the Far East.

The year 2018 witnessed a notable transition in the United States' strategic priorities, as evidenced by its most prominent defense document. The National Security Strategy of the United States, which was published in 2018 during the administration of Donald Trump, officially identified China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as rivals. The significance of the "war on terror" diminished, and a subsequent era emerged wherein the focus on military issues shifted back to competitiveness among governments.

The People's Republic of China, for its part, has begun to devote special attention to Latin America and the Caribbean very recently, already in the 21st century. This period was marked by the release of authoritative papers pertaining to his association with the region. In the years 2008 and 2016, two white papers were published, focusing on the intricate dynamics

of China's engagement with the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is worth mentioning that the paper formulated in 2008 is China's initial endeavor targeting a specific region, underscoring the significant attention and commitment that China devotes to Latin America and the Caribbean.

The paragraphs of these two documents, with regard to defense, are practically identical, providing for "strengthen policy dialogue and set up working meeting mechanisms, conduct exchanges of visits between delegations and vessels, deepen professional exchanges in such fields as military training, personnel training, and U.N. peacekeeping, expand pragmatic cooperation in humanitarian relief, counter-terrorism and other non-traditional security fields, and enhance cooperation in military trade and military technology." China's 2015 Military Strategy, in turn, has a chapter dedicated to cooperation in the military area, which, although it does not specifically mention any Latin American country, reinforces the ideas already contained in the White Papers. This Chinese attention to the region has not gone unnoticed by U.S. strategists.

Hence, it is apparent that the United States places significant political and strategic significance on exerting its influence over the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. The position is not of recent origin, as it can be traced back to the early decades of the 19th century, namely with the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine. China's engagement with the region has emerged relatively recently, although it has resulted in a substantial influx of commerce and investment, particularly during the initial two decades of the 21st century. The aforementioned phenomenon elicits a response from North America towards the increasing Chinese influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, which in turn has implications for Brazil's security and military sectors.

III. The United States' Stance on Security and Defense Matters in the Region

The Western Hemisphere remains of significant importance to the United States. According to Breg and Brands (2021), when considering geostrategic factors, it can be argued that Latin America and the Caribbean, specifically the nations within the Caribbean basin, serve as the primary conduit via which political instability or security threats may directly impact the United States.

The U.S. National Defense Strategy, published in 2022, leaves no doubt about this, stating that "The United States derives immense benefit from a stable, peaceful, and democratic Western Hemisphere that reduces threats to the homeland. To prevent distant threats from becoming a challenge at home, the Department will continue to partner with countries in the region to build capability and promote security and stability".

In a similar vein, the country's National Security Strategy, also for 2022, reports that "No region impacts the United States more directly than the Western Hemisphere." Later in the text, it makes direct reference to competition with China in the region: "Together, we will support effective democratic governance responsive to citizen needs, defend human rights and combat gender-based violence, tackle corruption, and protect against interference or coercion, including from the People's Republic of China, Russia, or Iran."

The significance of the region for the United States extends beyond mere documentation, as is evident in the speech and actions of diverse authorities. It is intriguing to examine the discourse employed by General Laura Richardson, the commander of the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), which is the joint command responsible for Latin America and the Caribbean (except Mexico).



Figure 2 – SOUTHCOM area of responsibility.
Source - USSOUTHCOM

During her testimony before the Congress of her nation in March 2023, the general expressed her apprehension regarding the actions of external powers inside the jurisdiction of her joint command.

At the end of the Cold War, the United States, its allies, and partners believed that democracy would displace authoritarianism around the globe. Twenty-five years later, the strategic environment in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has changed significantly. The 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) states, in no uncertain terms, that "autocrats are working overtime to undermine democracy." We see this right here in our own hemisphere that external malign actors like the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are aggressively exerting influence over our democratic neighbors. (Richardson, 2023)

The general highlights China's expanding impact as a significant actor, emphasizing its escalating commercial relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. It is projected that China's trade volume with the region will have surged from 18 billion dollars in 2002 to an estimated 450 billion dollars by 2022. The presented data illustrates a decline in the United States' trade advantage with the region due to erosion. According to her, China is currently

allocating resources towards the development of deep-water ports that could potentially impede the entrance of U.S. military and merchant vessels to the region in the event of a conflict. Additionally, China is also investing in space and cyber capabilities that possess the capacity for dual use, potentially serving both commercial and military purposes with questionable intentions. General Richardson regards this as a strategic risk that is deemed unacceptable and cannot be disregarded. The commander further asserts that China is the primary instigator of environmental transgressions within the region, particularly in relation to unlawful fishing, mining, and logging activities.

According to General Richardson, the primary focus of the Southern Command Campaign Plan is to uncover and address the detrimental actions carried out by China. The author posits that the strategic rivalry between the United States and China in the region can be characterized as an ideological competition between democracy and authoritarianism. Furthermore, the author suggests that the most effective approach for the United States to emerge victorious in this competition for influence is by providing assistance to the governments of the region's countries in effectively delivering public goods and services to their populations. Richardson asserts that Southern Command effectively advances democratic values in the region by means of security cooperation, joint exercises, and training programs, thereby mitigating the risk of the region being further influenced by nefarious and dictatorial forces. The general also mentioned the provision of security assistance, particularly through the implementation of Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Finance (FMF), and Excess Defense Articles (EAD) programs. In this context, the speaker provided an illustration by referring to the recent procurement made by the Brazilian Marines, wherein they acquired 12 light tactical vehicles for a total cost of US\$ 15.8 million.

Several other examples of cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries were cited by the commander, such as conducting joint exercises, humanitarian and health assistance support operations, engineering support, and meetings with high-level officials in the area (General Richardson reports having personally met with eight presidents, three vice presidents, and two prime ministers, as well as ministers and commanders of forces). At this point, it is interesting to highlight the words of the SOUTCHOM commander: "Relationships matter, and our democratic partners are desperate for U.S. assistance. But if we are not available on time, they will have no choice but to take whatever support is available, creating opportunities for China to expand its influence." To illustrate his reasoning, Richardson cited the example of COVID-19 vaccines, when countries in the region imported Chinese or Russian vaccines because U.S. ones were not available.

Richardson advocates for increased focus from the United States on the region, as evident in several public statements¹. The text posits a contradiction wherein Latin America and the Caribbean, although of utmost significance for U.S. security, receive disproportionately inadequate attention and resources from the U.S. government.

Therefore, it is evident that U.S. Southern Command aligns with the principles outlined in the U.S. National Security Strategy as it endeavors to uphold the existing situation in the

¹ It is suggested to watch the video of one of the most recent interviews at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TNgmqTQNUi&t=590s&ab_channel=CenterforStrategic%26InternationalStudies

Western Hemisphere by addressing the influence or involvement of non-regional countries. In response to the identified threats, the United States Southern Command (US SOUTHCOM) offers its proposed measures, which are grounded on the “integrated deterrent strategy².” Firstly, in operational terms, the implementation of exchanges and collaboration in the domains of education, drills, instruction, training, and the provision of SMEM (Search and Rescue, Medical, and Evacuation) services. Secondly, the establishment of command connections. Lastly, the execution of supplementary measures, offering support in the fields of healthcare, engineering (infrastructure), and humanitarian aid.

The current stance presents both challenges and opportunities for Brazil in the realms of security and defense. On the one hand, the nation, which has a well-established history of collaboration with the United States in these domains, can utilize this opportunity to enhance its military capabilities by furthering its doctrinal, operational, and technological cooperation. This may involve acquiring U.S. systems and materials under more favorable conditions for its armed and security forces, thereby augmenting its knowledge base. However, it is apparent that the United States would likely apply increased political and diplomatic pressure. Consequently, Brazilian authorities will need to possess a distinct capability to consistently prioritize the country's interests over those that may appear to be national interests but are, in fact, foreign objectives in disguise.

IV. China's Stance on Security and Defense Matters in the Region

China's National Defense in the New Era, a document that the Chinese government published in 2019, outlines China's intention to increase its military cooperation with countries in Latin America. This includes the establishment of the China and Latin America High-Level Defense Forum. The primary objective of this biannual meeting, as stated in the document, is to foster mutual understanding and collaboration. The forum seeks to advance Latin American militaries' comprehension of and confidence in China and its military while also facilitating ongoing military exchanges and cooperation between the Chinese and Latin American militaries.

The latest iteration of this assembly, which took place in December 2022, witnessed the involvement of military professionals hailing from twenty-four nations in the Latin American and Caribbean regions. According to General Wei Fanghe, the former defense minister of China, it is imperative for China and the countries in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region to collaborate in order to effectively address the intricate and demanding international and regional circumstances. This collaboration should aim to manage risks and challenges, enhance unity and cooperation, establish a more robust security framework, and endeavor to establish a novel paradigm of defense cooperation that encompasses various dimensions, spans a wide range of areas, and utilizes multiple channels. Our endeavors will result in novel and substantial advancements toward the promotion of peace and stability at both regional and

² The US Department of Defense (DoD) adopted the concept of integrated deterrence in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS). Integrated deterrence seeks to integrate all the tools of national power in all areas, geographies, and spectrums of conflict while working with “allies and partners.”.

global levels, as well as the establishment of a unified global society that fosters collective prosperity for all of humanity.

Ramalho and Cortinhas (2021) assert that the defense collaboration between China and Brazil has yielded three noteworthy outcomes. Firstly, a cooperation agreement was established to enhance the Amazon Protection System (SIPAM) through advancements in telecommunications and information technologies. This agreement also encompassed the CBERS (China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite) program. Secondly, a Brazil-China Joint Committee on Exchange and Cooperation was established to facilitate military exchanges, encompassing training, courses, and exercises in the military academies of both nations. Lastly, efforts were made to expedite bilateral trade in the defense products sector, but these endeavors proved to be unfeasible.

The current state of security and defense interactions between China and Brazil can be characterized as modest. In order to mitigate this limitation, China employs an indirect approach to rapprochement, leveraging its strategic advantages, particularly those stemming from its status as Brazil's primary trading ally. China strategically positions itself as a significant participant in global productive, financial, and scientific-technological frameworks, aiming to restructure global production and trade in alignment with its own goals. This is exemplified, for instance, by the nation's allocation of resources towards advanced military hardware, cyber capabilities, and artificial intelligence. (Ramalho and Cortinhas, 2021).

One instance illustrating Brazil's incorporation of Chinese technology, which carries significant defense implications and engenders issues in its relationship with the United States, pertains to the integration of Huawei's systems into the mobile phone infrastructure of Brazil.

Another strategy adopted by China to try to increase its capacity to influence regional processes is the increase of so-called soft power, which is understood as the Chinese effort to present aspects of its culture as a tool of attraction. President Xi Jinping himself, at the opening ceremony of the XIX National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, declared that China would improve its "capacity for engaging in international communication so as to tell China's stories well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance the country's cultural soft power." (Menechelli, 2018)

According to Menechelli (2018), China's utilization of soft power exhibits distinct characteristics. These include a pragmatic approach towards employing culture as a means of exerting influence, a prominent role of the state in cultural diplomacy initiatives, a less discernible differentiation between public diplomacy and propaganda, and the utilization of cultural diplomacy to foster internal security and cohesion. Hence, it is noteworthy that there has been a significant increase in the accessibility of Chinese cultural commodities to the Brazilian populace, facilitated through various mediums such as television, cinema, and the promotion of Chinese language and culture by the Confucius Institutes. The recently published Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, issued by the Chinese government, presents a set of principles aimed at tackling the root causes of international conflicts, enhancing international governance, fostering stability and coherence in an unpredictable and evolving era, and fostering enduring peace and global development.

The document aims to illustrate a "Chinese way" as a potential solution to the uncertainties and problems posed by a rapidly evolving world. It contrasts this approach with the perceived consequences of the "American way" for humanity. The principles that guide China's approach are rooted in the pursuit of win-win relationships, respect for national sovereignty, non-interference, the search for peaceful resolutions, dialogue, and legitimacy. These principles reflect China's aspiration to establish a leadership role that is justified by its adherence to high moral values. This approach aligns with the concept of Moral Realism put forth by Yan Xuetong.

Nevertheless, the document devotes only one paragraph to Latin America, in which it assumes the commitment to "support Latin American and Caribbean countries in actively fulfilling commitments stated in the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, and support the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and other regional and sub-regional organizations in playing an active role in upholding regional peace and security and properly handling regional hotspots."

Hence, it can be inferred that China's involvement in Brazil's security and defense sector is currently limited, primarily encompassing academic exchanges between military personnel and official meetings. However, China's significant economic and geopolitical advancements in recent years have extended its influence in this sector, leading to apprehension from the United States, the dominant global power. Since the 19th century, the United States has established a security framework in the Western Hemisphere, granting them hegemony in South America and the Caribbean, further intensifying their concerns.

However, the implementation of more assertive diplomatic measures influenced by the Global Security Initiative, as well as the heightened utilization of cultural soft power projection, have resulted in the acquisition of sympathies and increased awareness among Brazilians in both the public and private sectors. These efforts have been particularly effective in overcoming the previous lack of familiarity with a country that was previously unfamiliar due to significant geographical and cultural differences, which hindered meaningful interaction and mutual understanding.

The extent of Chinese influence in Brazil's security and defense sectors is currently in its early stages. However, the few interactions that currently exist are a source of concern for the United States, as it perceives China's efforts to improve relations as a potential challenge to its own influence.

IV. Concluding Remarks on the Implications for Brazil's Security and Defense Sector Arising from the Strategic Competition between the United States and China.

The dispute between the United States and China, including various domains of power such as politics, economics, psychological dynamics, scientific-technological advancements, and military capabilities, has discernible implications for Brazil across these spheres.

One instance illustrating this phenomenon is the responses that have already emerged after the recent resolution made during the BRICS³ conference, wherein the decision was made to broaden its participants by extending invitations to Argentina, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran. The addition of Iran, a nation that engages in international conflicts with the United States, imparts a geopolitical dimension to the group that was absent before its inception. The United States views this action as unfavorable to its interests. Brazil, the sole member of the group situated in the Western Hemisphere prior to Argentina's inclusion, will need to navigate the diplomatic arena adeptly in order to maintain a delicate equilibrium amidst opposing actors.

While China's impact on Brazil's security and defense sectors remains limited, its influence in other domains has indirect implications for these areas and holds potential for further expansion. This development has raised significant concerns for the United States, which has begun to openly express its apprehension, including within the military realm, as exemplified by General Laura Richardson's analysis.

It is widely acknowledged among Brazilians that, in order to safeguard their own interests, they must exhibit adeptness in navigating the intricate dynamics of the ongoing competition between the United States and China, alongside other nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that while the Western Hemisphere holds significant importance for the United States, as shown from historical evidence, it does not hold the same level of urgent strategic relevance for China. The objective of its presence on this continent is to uphold the unrestricted availability of necessary goods, facilitate the expansion of markets for its own merchandise, and secure advantageous positions that may be utilized as leverage by the United States in the pursuit of its worldwide objectives (Ramalho and Cortinhas,2021).

Ultimately, the responsibility for taking action lies with Brazil, independent of the interests of any state. Brazil must consistently prioritize its own national interests in order to pursue its own objectives. The task at hand necessitates a meticulous examination of the global political landscape and a precise evaluation of the potential outcomes stemming from the strategic decisions made by the United States and China. This is essential in order to anticipate and comprehend the effects and implications that these actions may have on Brazil, particularly in relation to its security and defense.

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³ A group of nations formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

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