

Pentagon calls for “pivot” to target Latin America

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It has been more than four years since the Obama administration announced its “pivot” or “rebalance” toward Asia, which amounted to a comprehensive strategy to militarily encircle China, undermine its economic influence in the region and compel Beijing to submit to Washington’s diktats.

Since then, the US has steadily escalated military provocations in the South China Sea, sending warships and strategic bombers within close proximity of Chinese-claimed islets, while encouraging Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and other Asian states to pursue a confrontational approach toward Beijing.

Within the Pentagon, there have recently been calls for US imperialism to expand this confrontation. It is not enough to challenge China, the world’s second largest economy, for dominance of the eastern Pacific or even for hegemony over the huge Eurasian landmass.

Rather, this confrontation must be pursued globally, according to senior military officials, with particular attention given to growing Chinese influence in Latin America.

This approach found expression in an article published in the most recent edition of *Parameters*, the journal of the US Army War College entitled “Expanding the Rebalance: Confronting China in Latin America.” The author, Col. Daniel Morgan, is described as a senior officer with “extensive White House, inter-agency and international experience.”

The Army War College functions as a preparatory school for officers being groomed as the Pentagon’s next top commanders, while also serving as a kind of military think tank, dedicated to elaborating US imperialist strategy.

Colonel Morgan’s article is presented as a warning that “China’s expansion into Latin America might well outflank the US rebalance in Asia.”

He writes: “The rise of Chinese power in the Asia-

Pacific region and in Latin America is a growing concern for US strategy. Recent US focus on the Middle East has facilitated Beijing’s political, economic and military expansion from the Pacific into South America. A new global economy has opened opportunities for growth and development with China and others in the Asia-Pacific. Some countries have responded with commitment to China in terms of economic trade and investment. In addition, governments such as Peru, Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua and Costa Rica have pledged international political support for Chinese interests, arms sales, and military training and education cooperation. These developments challenge US strategy as Chinese presence in both regions is arguably part of an intensifying competition between Beijing and the United States. This developing trans-Pacific interdependency between the two regions creates one integrated problem rather than two separate regional ones.”

Morgan warns that Chinese trade and investment in the region is “creating economic interdependencies and undermining US influence and generating further political, social and economic tensions.”

Hard economic statistics make clear the source of US imperialism’s concerns. In the space of little more than a decade, trade between China and Latin America increased more than 20-fold, from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$289 billion in 2013. China has become Latin America’s second-largest export market, after the US. It has already supplanted the US as the number one trading partner in Brazil, Chile, and Peru.

Beijing has also emerged as a top creditor to the region, with loans to Argentina totaling \$19 billion; Brazil, \$22 billion; Venezuela, \$56.3 billion; Ecuador, \$10.8 billion; and Peru, \$2.3 billion.

In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to invest \$250 billion in Latin America over the next decade.

Meanwhile, the deceleration of the Chinese economy

since 2013 has had a severe impact on a number of Latin American economies, driving down prices on commodities such as oil, copper, iron ore and soya, and fueling deepening political crises in Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and other countries.

Colonel Morgan condemns China for its “no strings attached” policy on trade, credit and investment, saying that it serves to “strengthen anti-US governments like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador...”

Tellingly, he writes, “Chinese investment in Latin America impedes US access by providing governments with financing alternatives,” and goes on to note that by 2010 Chinese loan commitments to the region’s governments exceeded the combined total of the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and US Import-Export Bank.” In other words, the concern is that Chinese credit deprives Washington of a means of bringing Latin American governments to heel through financial strangulation.

The article also presents increased Chinese military ties to Latin America as a threat to US interests, citing recent or pending arms deals with Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and other countries, together with official visits by military delegations as well as “military officer education exchanges.”

“PRC [People’s Republic of China] military presence and influence in the region provides China with strategic options that can overtly or covertly support Chinese activities in the Asia-Pacific,” the article states. “The United States cannot underestimate the threat posed by Beijing’s military presence in the Western Hemisphere.”

An earlier article written by War College professor R. Evan Ellis, entitled “The strategic relevance of Latin America for the United States,” poses the question even more starkly:

“To view the matter through a military analogy, Latin America is the unoccupied high-ground overseeing the US position. A responsible commander would recognize that the occupation of that high ground by an adversary poses an unacceptable threat to his force, and thus would dedicate resources to block the adversary from doing so. By this analogy, it would be a grave error for the United States to conclude that, in the absence of serious threats to the United States from Latin America, it is okay to merely watch as potential future adversaries such as Russia and China expand their positions in the region. While such neglect, in the short term, may ‘free up resources’ to continue other engagements abroad, over the long term, willing cessation of its own neighborhood by the U.S. is

the single factor most likely to force the United States into a chaotic retreat from its external engagements.”

Ellis argues that the Pentagon must stop viewing Latin America through the prism of “drugs, organized crime, and border issues,” and instead approach it from the standpoint of imperialist strategy and the necessity of eliminating “the potential for a powerful extra-hemispheric actor to use the region to harm the United States or impair its ability to act in other parts of the world in the event of a future conflict.”

A little over two years ago, US Secretary of State John Kerry declared at a meeting of the Organization of American States that “The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over,” referring to the nearly 200-year-old canon of US foreign policy that endowed Washington with right to use force in preventing outside powers from establishing a foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

Initially invoked as a US policy of opposing any attempt by European empires to re-colonize newly independent countries in Latin America, it was turned into a declaration of a US sphere of influence and became the rationale for some 50 direct US military interventions in the region along with the fomenting of CIA-backed coups that imposed fascist-military dictatorships over much of the region in the second half of the 20th century.

The line being developed at the Army War College indicates that, as far as the Pentagon is concerned, the Monroe Doctrine needs to be dusted off and re-employed as part of the justification for the explosive growth of US militarism directed against China and at asserting US imperialism’s hegemony over all of the world’s strategic markets and resources.

The warning is clear: Latin America will not be exempted from the drive toward a third world war that has been generated by the insoluble and deepening crisis of US and global capitalism.



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