

US SOUTHCOM chief calls Latin America “front line” in clash with China

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Latin America has become the “front line” in a struggle against China’s challenge to US global hegemony, the commander of US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which oversees US military operations in the region, told the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday.

SOUTHCOM chief, Adm. Craig Faller, told the committee that there was a “sense of urgency” in confronting the challenge posed by China’s growing economic influence in the region, which he repeatedly referred to as “our neighborhood,” a somewhat sanitized version of the old Yankee imperialist phrase, “our own backyard.”

“Our influence is eroding,” Faller warned, pointing out that China has already supplanted the US as the number one trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay, and comes in a close second throughout the region. China-Latin America trade has soared from \$17 billion a decade ago to over \$315 billion today and is projected to reach \$500 billion by 2025.

“The PRC [People’s Republic of China] is rapidly advancing toward their goal of economic dominance of the region within the next ten years,” Faller said, though, by his own admission this may come sooner.

Repeatedly describing China’s relations with the region as “insidious,” the admiral charged that Chinese investment in the construction of ports and other infrastructure constituted an “abuse” of economic relations designed to “obfuscate the true purpose” of these projects, which he claimed is “to project and sustain military power at greater distances.”

Faller’s unsubstantiated accusations came as US officials are traveling throughout the Indo-Pacific region aggressively promoting an anti-Beijing military alliance. US imperialism is reportedly preparing to deploy offensive intermediate range ballistic missiles,

previously banned under a now-defunct treaty between Washington and Moscow, in a ring of countries surrounding China, including Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines.

The strongest evidence that Faller could provide of Chinese military intervention in Latin America was its giving away military gear to several countries and its invitation to Latin American personnel to attend military training programs which he alleged are “modeled after U.S. professional military education.” In other words, Beijing is engaged, on a limited scale, in activities that are supposed to be Washington’s exclusive prerogative in “its own backyard.”

Faller’s call for a “sense of urgency” was grounded in large measure by developments since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He accused both Beijing and Moscow of “taking advantage of the pandemic”—by providing vaccines to countries that are among the hardest hit by the deadly virus.

“In order to gain more access, presence, and influence in the region, the PRC and Russia are taking advantage of the pandemic, deploying medical diplomacy and disinformation campaigns—often overpromising and underdelivering,” he said. By “medical diplomacy,” he means the shipment of millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines, and by “disinformation,” he is referring to the fact that these shipments have been carried out as US imperialism refuses to provide a single dose to its “neighbors.”

China, he charged, is offering \$1 billion in loans to finance purchases of the Sinovac vaccine with the alleged “insidious” aims of further indebting the region to Beijing and “exploiting the pandemic to advance its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in trade, technology, and infrastructure.” He also accused Beijing of donating Huawei contact tracing technology

in an attempt to win the company bids for the development of 5G networks in the region.

Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, who had slavishly followed Washington's anti-China policy, previously rejected use of China's Sinovac vaccine in Brazil and had excluded the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei from bidding on the most lucrative 5G deal in the hemisphere. Now, facing close to 3,000 deaths a day and a pandemic spiraling out of control, Brasilia is importing the Sinovac vaccine and Huawei is being admitted to the country's 5G auction.

Faller did not mention Mexico, which is overseen by US NORTHCOM, whose commander also testified at the hearing. On Tuesday, it signed a contract for 20 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine, barely two weeks after the White House stated categorically that it would supply no vaccines to its southern neighbor.

Faller attempted to smear Beijing by lumping China together with "transnational criminal organizations," or TCOs, claiming that the latter "share the goal of PRC, Russia and other malign actors to advance their self-interests at the expense of our partners." The activities of the drug cartels, the admiral claimed, are underwritten by "Chinese money laundering."

Such charges are in line with the "Wuhan virus" claims that the coronavirus was produced in Chinese laboratory and the accusation that Beijing is engaged in "genocide" against its Muslim minority, i.e., part of a propaganda campaign aimed at paving the way to war.

For Washington to indict Beijing for laundering the cartels' cash is rich, given the multiple investigations and criminal indictments involving bankers from Wells Fargo, HSBC, Deutsche Bank, Bank of New York Mellon and other major US and Western financial institutions for laundering trillions in cash for the drug cartels and other criminal enterprises.

As for the supposedly injured interests of Washington's "partners," the foremost among them are the biggest drug traffickers in the hemisphere. While Faller celebrated the US military presence at a "cooperative security location" in Colombia and at a "Forward Operating Site in Honduras, home of Joint Task Force Bravo," he made no mention of the fact that the two countries are the principal conduits for drugs from South America to the US border. Just last week, US prosecutors in the Southern District of New York

declared Honduras a "narco state" and presented testimony that the country's President Juan Orlando Hernández had told a top drug dealer that he wanted to shove drugs "right up the noses of the gringos" as he accepted lucrative bribes in return for military protection for the cartels.

Posing the question as to what the Pentagon must do to counter China's rising influence in Latin America, Admiral Faller declared, "To put it simply, we out compete bad guys by being good guys."

He cited Pentagon "human rights training and Women, Peace, and Security programs" in Latin America, laughable window dressing for a US military apparatus that has carried out more than a century of invasions, coup plots and bloody counterinsurgency campaigns, whose victims number at least in the hundreds of thousands.

In warning the Senate committee about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Faller pointed not only to China's influence, but also to the region's intractable social crisis. He noted that Latin America, with roughly 8 percent of the world's population, had suffered more than one fifth of COVID cases and deaths, and that "there will also be a significant socioeconomic impact on our neighbors for years to come."

"Coming on the heels of widespread public protests against governments throughout the region at the end of 2019, these COVID-19 losses coupled with longstanding socioeconomic grievances and corruption have created the conditions for even greater instability and unrest among our partner nations," he said, adding, "Even some of our strongest partners are at risk of instability due to this confluence of factors."

In other words, even as US imperialism prepares to confront China's rising economic influence by military means, it faces the greater threat of social revolution throughout the hemisphere. The Pentagon's answer to this threat today will be the same as it was in the last century, support for counterrevolutionary violence and dictatorship. The Latin American working class must prepare its struggles accordingly.



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