



CHINA'S ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

January & February 2022

The following is a summary of open-source media reporting on China's presence and activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in January & February 2022. This is not a complete list of media reports on China's activities in Latin America but are some of the most relevant articles and reports selected by SFS researchers and fellows. The monitor does source a limited amount of media reports from state-owned or -controlled media outlets, which are carefully selected and solely intended to report on news that is not reported on by other media and is relevant for understanding VRIC influence in the region. This report is produced as part of our VRIC Monitor published monthly by the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS), a non-profit, national security think tank based in Washington D.C.



- State media reports there are boundless opportunities and huge potential for practical cooperation between China and Mexico, said Chinese State Councilor and Foreign

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Minister Wang Yi in a signed article published on Tuesday. February 14 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. - [CGTN on 15-FEB](#)

- State media reports the Government of Argentina is planning to send a military team to China in March to broker the purchase of combat aircraft, for which over US \$ 600 million have been allocated as per the 2022 Budget bill, it was reported. Argentina is said to be considering five offers, with China's JF-17 Thunder-Block III topping the list following President Alberto Fernández's recent meeting in Beijing with Xi Jinping, *Infobae* said. The South American country was planning to purchase some 12 units of that model, the newspaper also said. - [Merco Press on 14-FEB](#)
- Nicaragua's government led by President Daniel Ortega has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Chinese firms to develop investment projects. According to the Nicaraguan government, the agreements relate to strategic investments in renewable energy projects, hospital infrastructure and medical equipment, road, railway and port infrastructure as well as water and sanitation. - [LatinNews Daily on 11-FEB](#)
- State media reports next month an Argentine military delegation will be traveling to China as part of a bilateral defense cooperation understanding, which among other issues includes the potential purchase of twelve Chinese fighter aircraft for which the Argentine latest national budget has earmarked a 664 million dollars credit. - [Merco Press on 10-FEB](#)
- Following a bilateral meeting between presidents Alberto Fernández and Xi Jinping on February 6, Argentina has agreed to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – China's flagship global infrastructure development programme, which seeks to build trade and new political and economic ties with participating nations. - [Diálogo Chino on 08-FEB](#)
- A federal court in Virginia recently granted Microsoft the authority to seize websites used by a Chinese state-linked hacking group. Along with the U.S., the Nickel-targeted nations include Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and others. Both the Biden administration and other governments of the region have been “radio silent” about the Nickel case and China's growing cyber-intelligence offensive. - [Heritage Foundation on 08-FEB](#)
- State media reports China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Ecuador's Minister for Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries Julio Prado have signed a memorandum of understanding for free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. This marks the beginning of FTA negotiations between the two countries, China's Ministry of Commerce said in a statement. - [China.org.cn on 08-FEB](#)
- State media reports the Chinese Embassy in the United Kingdom reiterated its support for Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands. “Our position on the Malvinas Islands issue is consistent,” the Embassy tweeted, stressing that China has always advocated that territorial disputes should be resolved through peaceful

negotiations, as established by the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter. - [TeleSUR on 08-FEB](#)

- Chinese mining firm Zijin Mining Group Co Ltd will invest \$380 million to construct a lithium carbonate plant in Argentina via local subsidiary Liex, the country's Ministry of Production said. The plant will be located in the Tres Quebradas project, in the northern province of Catamarca, and will aim to produce 20,000 tons of lithium carbonate per year with the idea of doubling its production in the medium term, the government said. - [Mining.com on 04-FEB](#)
- State-owned China National Nuclear Corp (CNNC) has signed a contract in Argentina to build the \$8 billion Atucha III nuclear power plant using China's Hualong One technology, reviving a deal that had been stalled for years. CNNC said that it had signed an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract, which comes ahead of Argentine President Alberto Fernandez's trip to China later this week. - [Business Recorder on 02-FEB](#)
- China's Great Wall Motor said it will invest 11.5 billion yuan (\$1.81 billion) over the next decade to build electric vehicles in Brazil where it has taken over a factory from Daimler AG. The vehicles will be built from its new factory in the city of Iracemapolis in Sao Paulo state, which it officially took over. - [U.S. News on 28-JAN](#)
- Brazil and China missed the deadline at the end of 2021 to renew the two main documents that define the guidelines and priorities of their bilateral relations. Both the Ten Year Plan for Brazil-China Cooperation and the Joint Action Plan signed between the two countries in 2012 and 2014, respectively, expired in December, according to the Brazilian press. Talks between the two governments have been ongoing since 2019. - [Macao News on 27-JAN](#)
- Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the U.K.'s Foreign Affairs Committee, asserted that "China has been using infrastructure investment and debt diplomacy as a means of control" in Barbados and elsewhere. According to Tugendhat, "Some islands seem to be close to swapping a symbolic Queen in Windsor for a real and demanding emperor in Beijing." His concerns were reiterated in an article in the U.K. Sunday Times entitled "Little England? Not anymore – Barbados is becoming little China," insinuating the Caribbean Island was merely trading one colonial master for another. - [The Diplomat on 27-JAN](#)
- Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso has said that during his visit to China from February 4-5 he will focus on securing a free trade agreement (FTA) and renegotiating Ecuador's debt to the Asian giant. Lasso has made an FTA with China an economic priority of his government, although he has faced some pushback from domestic manufacturers – particularly the textile sector – that fear an influx of cheap Chinese goods. Lasso also said he would seek to renegotiate Ecuador's debt to China, which he said amounts to US\$4.6bn, in order to "separate oil from the debt payments so that this product can be freely available to the government." - [LatinNews Daily on 26-JAN](#)

- Argentina is reportedly close to signing an initial US\$35bn agreement with China for a five-year investment plan that would benefit major energy and infrastructure projects. The document will be signed before President Alberto Fernández begins a visit to Beijing that is expected to see further financing talks. Some of the projects that are expected to be included in the financing agreement are: Cauchari photovoltaic plant expansion (US\$400mn), Atucha III Nuclear Plant (US\$8.5bn), Néstor Kirchner and Jorge Cepernic hydro dams (US\$4bn). The financing will also be for railway modernization but will not include 5G due to Argentina's lack of adequate infrastructure for the technology, according to the sources. - [Business News Americas on 26-JAN](#)
- Pro-China messaging has been amplified in Venezuela's "hashtag of the day." In March 2021, pro-China messaging dominated Venezuelan Twitter around use of the hashtag #VacunaEsperanzayVida ("#VaccineHopeAndLife"), which trended thanks to the Nicolás Maduro regime's promotion as a part of its "hashtag of the day" campaigns. - [DFRLab on 26-JAN](#)
- Argentina's government is asking China for an expansion of its bilateral currency swap in yuan as it seeks to strengthen reserves ahead of payments due to the International Monetary Fund. Expanding the swap, which was originally agreed to in 2009, would allow Argentina to bolster its international reserves at a time when negotiations with the IMF to refinance over \$40 billion from an outstanding loan have stalled. - [BNN Bloomberg on 26-JAN](#)
- Ecuador's president Guillermo Lasso travels to China on February 3 to renegotiate some \$5bn in debt, including \$2bn in pre-paid crude sales. The government is hoping to sever the oil sales from the debt to free up supply for more cash-generating market sales. It also wants to cut interest rates and reschedule looming maturities. "We seek to extend the payment deadlines, improve the conditions and make the debt agreements more transparent," Ecuador's finance minister Simon Cueva said today. He declined to specify how much of state-owned PetroEcuador's crude exports are tied into the loan obligations. - [Argus Media on 26-JAN](#)
- Chinese technology and expertise is making it possible for Venezuela and Cuba to exercise suffocating control over digital communications in the two countries, according to insider accounts and several international investigations. Venezuela and Cuba do more to block internet access than any other governments in Latin America, according to the U.S.-based advocacy group Freedom House, which has documented what it describes as "digital authoritarianism" in the region since 2018. - [Voice of America on 14-JAN](#)
- China's state news agency Xinhua has revealed that Chinese firm Sinohydro Bureau will build a gas-powered energy plant in Bolivia's eastern Santa Cruz department. This will power a steel mill which is expected to produce 194,000 tonnes of steel per year. According to the commerce department of Qinghai, where the Chinese company is headquartered, this will reduce Bolivia's foreign exchange expenses for steel imports by nearly half. - [LatinNews Daily on 12-JAN](#)

- Chile's government pushed ahead with contracts to tap more of the world's biggest lithium reserves, raising harsh criticism from President-elect Gabriel Boric and other opposition groups seeking to halt the bidding process. The country awarded two of five contracts on offer -- one to Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD Co. Ltd. and another to local firm Servicios y Operaciones Mineras del Norte, the Mining and Energy Ministry said in a statement. - [Bloomberg on 12-JAN](#)
- China doubled down on imports of Iranian and Venezuelan crude in 2021, taking the most from the U.S.-sanctioned regimes in three years, as refiners brushed off the risk of penalties to scoop up cheap oil. - [Bloomberg on 10-JAN](#)