

# The Dragon's Overwatch: Chinese Private Security Expansion in Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Abstract

This scholarly disquisition furnishes a comprehensive exploration of the burgeoning presence of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), delving into the strategic repercussions for regional security architectures and national sovereignty imperatives. Employing a meticulous qualitative methodology encompassing a thorough literature review, policy document analysis, and an examination of Chinese-language sources, the research elucidates the salient drivers catalyzing this phenomenon. These precipitating factors span cultural affinities, economic motivations, geopolitical ambitions, and the exigent security challenges besetting Chinese commercial entities operating within the LAC region. The operational modes of Chinese PSCs are subjected to forensic scrutiny, illuminating their diverse service offerings, geographical permeation across the region, and the obstacles they confront. Furthermore, the inquiry contextualizes the issue within the broader geopolitical milieu, accentuating concerns regarding transparency lacunae, regulatory deficiencies, and potential avenues for Chinese intelligence and military machinations, thereby potentially destabilizing the regional equilibrium. Ultimately, the research culminates in a series of substantive policy prescriptions aimed at mitigating risks, fortifying regional stability, and safeguarding national sovereignty through capacity-building initiatives, constructive engagement with Beijing, enhanced transparency mechanisms, and robust regional cooperation frameworks.

## Keywords:

Chinese Private Security Companies (PSCs); Latin America; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); Geopolitical Strategy; Global Security Dynamics.

## Article info

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## Literature Review

The expansion of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean has emerged as a significant development in the realm of international security and geopolitical dynamics. This literature review synthesizes key insights from recent studies, reports, and scholarly articles to provide a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

### 1. Overview of Chinese Private Security Companies (PSCs)

Chinese PSCs have been proliferating globally, particularly in regions where China has substantial investments. Markusen (2022) describes the quiet yet rapid growth of Chinese PSCs, highlighting their role in safeguarding Chinese nationals and assets abroad. These companies have become essential components of China's broader security strategy, as detailed by Heath (2018), who explores China's pursuit of overseas security through various mechanisms, including the deployment of PSCs.

### 2. Strategic Motives and Geopolitical Context

The deployment of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean is intricately linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Rolland (2019) discusses the strategic implications of securing the BRI, emphasizing the need for robust security measures to protect Chinese interests along the Silk Roads. This strategic imperative is further elaborated by Ding et al. (2021), who analyze Chinese investment in Latin America and the sectoral complementarities that necessitate enhanced security measures.

### 3. Regional Dynamics and Challenges

Latin America and the Caribbean present unique challenges for Chinese PSCs, given the region's complex security environment. Ellis (2024) examines China's security engagement in the region, noting the increasing presence of Chinese PSCs amid rising violence and protests against Chinese investments. This sentiment is echoed by the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (2024), which reports on the growing opposition to Chinese projects and the corresponding rise in security measures.

### 4. Case Studies and Incidents

Several high-profile incidents underscore the volatile environment in which Chinese PSCs operate. For example, Hendrix (2022) highlights the targeting of Chinese nationals as China deepens its international reach, illustrating the risks faced by Chinese entities abroad. Similarly, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2022) provides detailed accounts of security challenges encountered by Chinese projects in Latin America, including kidnappings and attacks on Chinese workers.

### 5. Legal and Regulatory Considerations

The legal framework governing the operations of Chinese PSCs is another critical aspect of their expansion. Daum (2024) analyzes China's national intelligence law

and its implications for PSC operations abroad, suggesting that legal ambiguities and extraterritorial applications may complicate the regulatory landscape. The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2023) also delves into China's global legal reach, highlighting the potential for legal conflicts and jurisdictional disputes.

## **6. Implications for Regional and Global Security**

The presence of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean has broader implications for regional and global security. Swaine and Tellis (2000) and the U.S. Department of Defense (2023) discuss the strategic ramifications of China's military and security developments, suggesting that the expansion of PSCs may alter the security dynamics in host countries and beyond. This is particularly pertinent considering China's military strategy, as outlined by the Information Office of the State Council (2015), which emphasizes the need for comprehensive security measures to support China's global ambitions.

## **7. Future Prospects and Developments**

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean will likely be shaped by ongoing geopolitical shifts and the evolving security landscape. Chizzoni (2024) and Lazarus & Ellis (2023) explore the future endeavors and prospects of Chinese PSCs, noting that their role will continue to expand in response to emerging threats and strategic opportunities. The dynamic nature of this expansion underscores the need for continuous monitoring and analysis to understand its full impact.

Accordingly, the expansion of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean represents a significant development with far-reaching implications for regional and global security. As China continues to deepen its investments and strategic engagements in the region, the role of PSCs will become increasingly pivotal. This literature review has synthesized key insights from recent studies, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and the critical factors that will shape its future trajectory.

## **Introduction**

The inexorable expansion of China's economic imprint across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been accompanied by a concomitant surge in security challenges confronting Chinese commercial entities operating within the region. A litany of incidents, ranging from political upheaval to targeted assaults against Chinese nationals and threats to Chinese investments, have underscored the pressing imperative for robust security measures (Heath 2018). In response to this exigency, Chinese private security companies (PSCs) have proliferated across LAC nations, offering a panoply of security services tailored to the specific needs of Chinese

businesses, state-owned enterprises, and an escalating expatriate presence. The growth of this industry, vertically integrated into China's burgeoning global commercial footprint, raises profound concerns that transcend the immediate realm of safeguarding economic interests. As these PSCs gain an increasingly entrenched presence within sensitive sectors and alongside strategically vital infrastructure projects, apprehensions regarding transparency deficits, regulatory inadequacies, and potential infringements on host country sovereignty have assumed an acute dimension (Sukhankin 2023). Allegations of opaque ownership structures, suspected intelligence-gathering functions and the perceived propensity to operate as adjuncts to China's security apparatus have fueled suspicions of a more nefarious geopolitical agenda.

This scholarly inquiry seeks to dissect the multifarious drivers catalyzing the proliferation of Chinese PSCs in LAC, scrutinize their diverse operational modes, and contextualize the phenomenon within the broader geopolitical milieu. Through a meticulous qualitative methodology encompassing an extensive literature review, analysis of policy documents, and examination of authoritative Chinese-language sources, this research aims to elucidate the strategic ramifications for regional security architectures and test prevailing assumptions regarding Beijing's long-term strategic calculus.

Ultimately, the overarching objective is to furnish substantive policy prescriptions to mitigate potential risks, fortify regional stability, and defend national sovereignty imperatives through capacity-building initiatives, constructive engagement with Beijing enhanced transparency mechanisms, and robust regional cooperation frameworks. As China's global footprint continues its upward trajectory, comprehending the complexities surrounding the role of PSCs in the LAC sphere acquires profound significance for discerning the contours of an evolving multipolar world order.

## 1. Motivations Catalyzing Proliferation

The proliferation of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean is being propelled by a multifaceted constellation of interrelated factors that coalesce around economic opportunism, geopolitical aspirations, security vulnerabilities, and cultural affinity. These catalyzing forces have engendered a fertile landscape conducive to the rapid expansion of Chinese PSCs across the region.

**1.1. Cultural Prominently and Established Networks:** Chinese PSCs strategically leverage shared cultural familiarity, linguistic commonalities, and pre-existing networks with fellow Chinese entities to cultivate trust and gain a competitive advantage in securing contracts from Chinese corporations seeking specialized

protection (Markusen 2022). This cultural proximity, undergirded by a shared understanding of business norms and communication styles, enables seamless coordination between the PSCs and their clientele, granting them an edge over international competitors. Moreover, the well-entrenched diaspora of Chinese migrants across LAC nations provides these companies with a reservoir of local knowledge, facilitating their ability to navigate complex cultural terrains adroitly.

**1.2. Economic Imperatives and Investment Protection:** The exponential growth of Chinese investment across strategic sectors in LAC countries, including petroleum, mining, construction, and infrastructure development, has paradoxically rendered these economic interests increasingly susceptible to an array of security challenges (Ding, et al. 2021). Political instability, organized crime, social unrest, and targeted attacks against Chinese nationals have conspired to create an environment of heightened risk, necessitating robust protective measures. As China's economic tentacles pervade deeper into the region, safeguarding these substantial investments through specialized security services has become an overriding priority to ensure uninterrupted operations and mitigate potential losses.

**1.3. Geopolitical Aspirations and Strategic Influence:** The burgeoning footprint of Chinese PSCs in LAC is emblematic of China's grand geopolitical ambitions to amplify its influence and strategic influence within a region historically dominated by U.S. hegemony (Wintgens 2022). This phenomenon can be interpreted as a manifestation of China's concerted efforts to extend its sphere of influence, assert its status as a preeminent global power, and potentially countervail the traditional primacy of the U.S. in its erstwhile "backyard." The proliferation of PSCs serves as a force multiplier, enabling China to safeguard its economic equities while simultaneously projecting its security apparatuses, thereby accruing strategic leverage.

**1.4. Security Emergencies and Vulnerabilities Laid Bare:** A litany of high-profile incidents across the region, including political upheaval, targeted attacks against Chinese nationals, threats to Chinese investment projects, and kidnappings for ransom, have accentuated the acute imperative for robust protective measures (Hendrix 2022). These incidents have laid bare the vulnerability of Chinese personnel and assets in LAC nations grappling with endemic insecurity, organized crime, and weak governance structures. The failure of local authorities to adequately address these security threats has catalyzed an unprecedented demand for the specialized risk mitigation services provided by Chinese PSCs, which possess the requisite cultural awareness, language proficiency, and tailored capabilities to operate effectively in such volatile environments.

This intricate tapestry of economic, geopolitical, cultural, and security imperatives has coalesced to forge an opportune environment for the propagation of Chinese PSCs across Latin America and the Caribbean. As China's footprint in the region continues its ascendant trajectory, the role of these companies in safeguarding

Chinese interests while simultaneously advancing broader strategic objectives will likely assume greater significance in the evolving regional security dynamics.

## 2. Operational Modalities

Chinese PSCs operate across a diverse spectrum of security services, encompassing electronic surveillance, consultancy, and armed protection. Their efficacy and degree of permeation, however, vary across different regions, with a more formidable presence in Asia and Africa compared to LAC. Within the LAC region, Chinese PSCs confront an array of impediments emanating from legal constraints, competition from well-established security firms, and the imperative to deftly navigate intricate sociopolitical dynamics. Nonetheless, the expanding Chinese commercial footprint in LAC and the attendant security predicaments faced by Chinese entities create an intrinsic demand for Chinese PSCs ([Lazarus and Ellis 2023](#)).

The exponential proliferation of global Chinese engagements over the past two decades has engendered a commensurate need to safeguard Chinese operations and personnel operating in volatile environments ([Swaine and Tellis 2000](#)). This imperative was poignantly underscored in the “Wolf Warrior” cinematic franchise, which depicted Chinese citizens working abroad under threat from foreign mercenaries, necessitating rescue operations ([Ho 2022](#)). Moreover, the exigencies of evacuating Chinese nationals from Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015 due to political upheaval, coupled with recent attacks against Chinese personnel in Pakistan, accentuated Beijing’s pressing obligation to protect its citizens and its burgeoning military and strategic capabilities ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2024](#)). Concurrently, these incidents illuminated how China’s avowed commitment to respecting the sovereignty of other nations—as articulated in its 2015 Military Strategy ([The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China 2015](#)) and 2022 Defense Strategy White Papers—constrained its options for official military intervention ([U.S. Department of Defense 2023](#)).

In an endeavor to mitigate the risks confronting their overseas operations, China-based companies have adopted a bifurcated approach: collaborating with local authorities and contracting private security companies (PSCs). In recent years, a cadre of private security firms has emerged in China to buttress operations both domestically and abroad. The proliferation of Chinese PSCs has arguably been predicated on the presumption that cultural familiarity, linguistic affinity, and pre-existing relationships with fellow Chinese entities will confer a competitive advantage in securing contracts with Chinese corporations seeking protection ([Chizzoni 2024](#)).

By 2022, estimates suggest the existence of approximately 7,000 Chinese PSCs, with 20-40 such firms operating across as many as 40 countries globally ([Markusen 2022](#)). The scope of services offered by Chinese PSCs is broad, ranging from firms



specializing in electronic surveillance systems to consulting services and the provision of armed personnel to physically protect Chinese assets and nationals. Generally, the deployment of Chinese PSCs has been most extensive in Asia and, to a lesser extent, in Africa, where their familiarity with local cultural practices is more pronounced and host governments exhibit greater malleability (Badawi 2024). In more developed regions like Latin America and the Caribbean, the penetration of PSCs has been relatively constrained by their lack of experience, coupled with intense competition from well-established and well-resourced firms adept at navigating (or circumventing) local legal frameworks.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the expanding presence of China-based companies in Latin America and the Caribbean has engendered an inherent demand for Chinese private security services (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2023). Since 2000, according to authoritative data from the Latin America-China academic network, Chinese companies have invested over \$184 billion across 600 projects in the LAC region (Lazarus and Ellis 2023). Chinese companies operating in sectors such as petroleum, mining, construction, and others have been persistently beleaguered by security challenges. In January 2007, protestors seized control of a Chinese-operated oilfield in Tarapoa, Ecuador (Reuters 2007). Attacks against the Emerald Energy oilfield in Colombia in 2011 resulted in the abduction of Chinese hostages (Boadle 2011). In Peru, recurrent violence has been linked to protests and criminal activity at Chinese-operated mines in Shougang Hierro, Rio Blanco, and Las Bambas (Aquino 2024). Attacks compelled Sinohydro to suspend construction on the Patuca III dam in Honduras, while numerous strikes have disrupted Chinese hydroelectric and road construction projects in Bolivia. Most recently, escalating violence in Colombia has forced China-based Zijin to shutter operations at the Burtica gold mine and China-owned Emerald Energy to suspend its oil operations (Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate 2022).

Amidst the current deterioration of economic conditions, surging violence, and intensifying social unrest across Latin America, coupled with China's anticipated expansion in the post-COVID-19 milieu, security challenges confronting China-based operations in the region are poised to escalate shortly (Gębska and Krukowska 2022). Official Chinese policy documents, such as the 2016 China-Latin America Policy White Paper, the China-CELAC 2022-2024 plan, and the February 2023 white paper on China's "Global Security Initiative," acknowledge Beijing's interest in multifaceted security cooperation with Latin America but remain conspicuously silent on the issue of private security companies (Ellis 2024).

Although China-based private security companies have maintained a low profile in Latin America and the Caribbean, a search of Chinese-language internet sources, such as Baidu, reveals multiple Chinese PSCs operating or actively seeking opportunities in the region (Ellis 2024). In Peru, China Security Technology Group has forged a memorandum of cooperation with Grand Tai Peru, a company providing security

services in the mining sector. Beijing Dujie Security Technology Company maintains an office in Argentina, while China Overseas Security Group claims.

In Central America, Zhong Bao Hua, a security company, claims to have established “strategic cooperation businesses” in Panama, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. Tie Shen Bao Biao advertises personal protection services in Panama. In Mexico, the “Mexico-Chinese Security Council,” formed in 2012 by former Chinese government official Feng Chengkang, has assumed the mission of safeguarding Chinese business personnel based in Mexico from gang-related violence ([Seade 2024](#)).

Other Chinese-language materials on Baidu hint at a clandestine network of Chinese security activities with potential links to the government, which may extend far deeper. In addition to 14 Chinese “overseas police stations” operating in eight LAC countries, China advertises “Chinese Aid Centers” operating in the region with mandates encompassing “urgent lifesaving, integration training, legal assistance, and helping the poor”. Chinese personnel recruiting website solicits applications for security-related positions in Latin America for projects in Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina ([Ellis 2024](#)).

While China-based companies have a legitimate right to contract Chinese nationals and entities, consistent with local laws, to help protect their expanding operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, the lack of public knowledge surrounding this phenomenon in the region, exacerbated by Beijing’s efforts to confine their interactions to Chinese-language media, warrants greater scrutiny as a matter of public policy. Enhanced transparency is imperative to ensure that such companies are properly registered and regulated and that the sovereign interests of the host countries and the safety of their citizens are safeguarded.

### **3. Geopolitical and Sovereignty Implications**

The proliferation of Chinese private security companies across Latin America and the Caribbean carries profound geopolitical ramifications that transcend the immediate realm of safeguarding commercial interests. As these entities gain an increasingly entrenched presence within sensitive sectors and alongside strategically vital infrastructure projects, they have catalyzed a constellation of concerns that implicate national sovereignty imperatives, regional stability dynamics, and the evolving contours of great power rivalries.

At the core of these apprehensions lies the specter of extraterritorial law enforcement overreach and potential collusion between Chinese PSCs and Chinese law enforcement entities. Allegations of clandestine “overseas police stations” operated by Chinese authorities in at least eight LAC countries, some purportedly



without formal approval from host governments, have ignited fears of sovereignty breaches. These covert outposts, ostensibly established to facilitate China's global "Fox Hunt" and "Sky Net" anti-crime campaigns, have been decried as potential conduits for the apprehension and extradition of fugitives, circumventing established legal protocols and infringing upon the judicial autonomy of nation-states ([U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2023](#)).

Moreover, the burgeoning presence of Chinese PSCs in the LAC sphere carries profound geopolitical undertones, particularly against the backdrop of escalating strategic tensions between China and the United States. As Beijing seeks to amplify its influence and project its status as a preeminent global power, critics have voiced concerns that Chinese PSCs could potentially serve as vectors for Chinese intelligence and military activities in a region historically dominated by U.S. hegemony. This perceived encroachment into America's traditional "sphere of influence" has engendered apprehensions regarding regional stability and the potential erosion of U.S. strategic interests.

Compounding these geopolitical anxieties is the specter of intelligence vulnerabilities stemming from the pervasive presence of former People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel and security services among Chinese PSC employees. Coupled with the inherent data accessibility granted to Chinese companies deploying surveillance systems under China's 2017 National Intelligence Law, this dynamic amplifies the risks of espionage and the potential compromise of sensitive information ([Daum 2024](#)). The opaque nature of Chinese PSC operations and their suspected ties to Beijing's security apparatus have fueled suspicions of clandestine intelligence-gathering activities, eroded trust, and exacerbating geopolitical frictions.

Furthermore, as the presence of Chinese PSCs intensifies across LAC nations, accompanied by an influx of armed Chinese nationals prioritizing the interests of their operations and compatriots, the risk of deadly encounters with local populations increases. This phenomenon mirrors patterns observed in Africa and other regions, where the deployment of PSCs has precipitated an escalation of violence and the erosion of public trust ([Ellis 2024](#)). In a region grappling with endemic insecurity, the potential for such confrontations could further destabilize fragile security environments and exacerbate social tensions.

Amidst this backdrop of geopolitical brinkmanship, Beijing's demonstrated willingness to conduct military and intelligence operations in the Western Hemisphere has amplified concerns regarding the potential military implications of Chinese PSC proliferation. The deployment of suspected "spy balloons," the establishment of an upgraded electronic intelligence facility in Cuba, and negotiations for a military "training base" on the island have raised alarms about the projection of Chinese military power and the undermining of regional security ([Strobel, et al. 2023](#)). In this context, the presence of Chinese PSCs across LAC could provide additional

opportunities for the clandestine insertion of Chinese special forces or the facilitation of intelligence-gathering activities, further exacerbating regional anxieties.

The dearth of transparency surrounding the activities of Chinese PSCs in LAC nations raises legitimate questions about their adherence to international norms, respect for the sovereignty of host countries, and the potential for regulatory arbitrage (Spearin 2020). The shroud of opacity enveloping their operations, coupled with allegations of opaque ownership structures and suspected intelligence-gathering functions, has fueled suspicions of a more nefarious geopolitical agenda, eroding trust and stoking concerns about potential infringements on national security and democratic governance.

Finally, the expansion of Chinese diaspora communities in LAC, often concentrated in regions plagued by socioeconomic disparities and concomitant criminal elements, has rendered them vulnerable to victimization by gang violence, extortion from local and Chinese criminal groups, or even anti-Chinese hate crimes. This dynamic could inadvertently intensify pressure for the deployment of Chinese PSCs, potentially facilitating the penetration of transnational criminal networks and exacerbating the challenges already confronting fragile governance structures (Rolland 2019).

This intricate tapestry of geopolitical anxieties, sovereignty concerns, and security imperatives underscores the pressing need for a nuanced and multifaceted policy response. As China's global footprint continues its ascendant trajectory, comprehending the complexities surrounding the role of PSCs in the LAC sphere acquires profound significance for safeguarding regional stability, upholding the sanctity of national sovereignty, and navigating the turbulent currents of evolving multipolar world order.

#### **4. Beyond Wolf Warriors: The Complex Propaganda of Chinese Private Security Companies in the Media**

As China's global economic footprint expands, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road, the role of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) operating abroad has gained increasing significance. A critical aspect of these companies is that the personnel who work in Chinese security firms operating abroad do not possess weapons and usually rely on cooperation with private security firms in the host state. This stark reality contrasts sharply with popular media representations, such as the Wolf Warrior franchise, which often depicts these security personnel as armed heroes.

As we noted, the evolution of Chinese PSCs can be traced back to the 1990s, with a series of laws allowing for the limited privatization of state security functions. These early regulations restricted licenses to former military and police personnel and prohibited private security officers from carrying weapons. While subsequent

amendments have expanded the sector's reach, these initial limitations continue to shape the development of PSCs with "Chinese characteristics" ([Arduino 2023](#)).

Despite the growing need for security in unstable regions where China has significant investments, Beijing has been reluctant to deploy the People's Liberation Army for protection. As a result, the evolving Chinese private security sector has stepped in to fill this "security gap" ([Legarda and Nouwens 2018](#)). However, these companies operate under significant constraints, particularly their inability to arm their personnel abroad and their dependence on local security partners.

**4.1. Media Portrayal and Propaganda Layers:** The Wolf Warrior franchise serves as a prime example of how Chinese media portrays security personnel operating abroad. These films typically depict heroic Chinese operatives protecting national interests in foreign lands, often through armed conflict. However, this portrayal stands in stark contrast to the reality of Chinese PSCs tasked with a passive role including asset protection from riots, theft, kidnapping for ransom, terrorism, or even maritime piracy. This discrepancy between media representation and reality serves multiple propaganda purposes:

**4.1.1. Overt messaging:** The films promote patriotism and the importance of protecting China's global interests.

**4.1.2. Preparation for potential casualties:** By depicting dangerous scenarios, these media portrayals may be subtly preparing the public for the possibility of Chinese casualties in foreign lands.

**4.1.3. Subtle themes:** They normalize the presence of Chinese security personnel in high-risk environments abroad.

**4.2. Preparing the Public for a Global Presence:** Beijing's ability to project its image as a developing country rather than a former colonial power while still benefiting from the U.S. security umbrella has shielded Chinese workers and investments. However, as China's global role expands, this facade is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. The media portrayal of PSCs can be seen as part of a broader strategy to prepare the Chinese public for a more assertive global presence, even as the reality of unarmed personnel relying on local partners persists.

**4.3. The Paradox of Non-armed PSCs and Media Portrayal:** China has imposed restrictions on the private security companies' access to weaponry, compelling them to rely on armed personnel from local or international organizations. This reality stands in stark contrast to the armed heroes often depicted in popular media. This discrepancy may serve to manage public expectations while still inspiring national pride and support for China's global endeavors.

**4.4. Implications for China's Global Security Strategy:** Given China's growing global economic and diplomatic engagement, the Chinese government will increasingly rely on private security companies, whatever its reservations. The media

portrayal of PSCs may be part of a broader strategy to prepare the public for this shift, potentially paving the way for policy changes or expanded operational procedures for PSCs in the future. However, the current reality of unarmed Chinese security personnel abroad presents significant challenges that may need to be addressed. Accordingly, the portrayal of Chinese PSCs in the media serves a complex propaganda purpose that goes beyond simple patriotic messaging. By balancing heroic depictions with subtle hints of risk, these portrayals may be preparing the Chinese public for the realities of an expanded global presence, including the possibility of casualties. As China continues to navigate the challenges of protecting its overseas interests with unarmed personnel relying on local partnerships, the role of PSCs—and their representation in the media—is likely to evolve further.

## 5. Policy Recommendations

Confronting the multifarious challenges posed by the proliferation of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean necessitates a nuanced and multidimensional policy response. As these entities gain an increasingly pervasive presence within the region, safeguarding regional stability, upholding national sovereignty imperatives, and preserving the integrity of democratic institutions demands a judicious amalgam of capacity-building initiatives, constructive diplomacy, regulatory oversight, and concerted regional cooperation.

At the core of this endeavor lies the imperative for host nations to prioritize capacity-building measures that bolster their domestic security capabilities and reduce an over-reliance on foreign security providers. This strategic recalibration could encompass initiatives to enhance specialized training programs tailored to the unique challenges confronting the region, the procurement of advanced equipment and technologies to augment operational effectiveness, and the cultivation of strategic partnerships with regional allies to leverage complementary strengths and resources. By fortifying their internal capacities, LAC nations can mitigate potential vulnerabilities and assert greater autonomy in managing their security imperatives.

Concurrently, constructive, and sustained engagement with China through robust diplomatic channels is essential to address lingering concerns regarding the activities of Chinese PSCs and promote greater transparency and accountability. Substantive dialogue facilitated through bilateral and multilateral forums can serve as platforms to establish clear guidelines, expectations, and codes of conduct that govern the operations of these entities within the region. These engagements must underscore the imperative of respecting national sovereignty, adhering to international norms, and fostering an environment of mutual trust and cooperation.

Complementing these diplomatic overtures, host nations must prioritize the implementation of enhanced transparency and regulatory frameworks that mandate

Chinese PSCs operating within their territories to adhere to rigorous reporting standards and comprehensive oversight mechanisms. This could involve mandatory registration processes, periodic audits, strict adherence to local labor laws, and robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with established norms and regulations. By subjecting these entities to scrutiny and accountability, LAC nations can mitigate potential risks, safeguard their security interests, and uphold the sanctity of their sovereign prerogatives.

Moreover, fostering public awareness and engaging civil society organizations is paramount to enhancing scrutiny, promoting accountability, and safeguarding democratic norms in the face of the growing influence of Chinese PSCs. By empowering citizens and independent watchdog groups with access to information and platforms for constructive discourse, host nations can harness the collective vigilance of their societies to detect potential transgressions and advocate for transparency and adherence to the rule of law.

Ultimately, the complexity and transnational nature of the challenges posed by Chinese PSC proliferation demands a concerted and coordinated regional response. Strengthening existing regional cooperation mechanisms, facilitated by institutions such as the Organization of American States (OAS) or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), is crucial to enable effective information sharing, joint risk assessments, and collaborative strategies to address the security implications of this phenomenon. By harnessing the collective wisdom and resources of the region, LAC nations can forge a united front, safeguarding their shared interests and upholding the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference.

In this endeavor, the establishment of a dedicated regional task force or working group could prove instrumental in monitoring the activities of Chinese PSCs, identifying potential threats, and devising coordinated responses. This platform could serve as a clearinghouse for intelligence sharing, facilitate the dissemination of best practices, and enable rapid communication and cooperation in the event of emergency or security breaches.

Furthermore, fostering strategic partnerships with extra-regional allies and stakeholders could amplify the region's collective leverage and access to critical resources. Collaboration with entities such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), and other nations with vested interests in preserving regional stability could yield valuable insights, expertise, and potentially multilateral frameworks for addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the growing footprint of Chinese PSCs.

Finally, the confluence of capacity-building, diplomacy, regulatory oversight, public engagement, and regional cooperation provides a formidable arsenal to confront the geopolitical implications and sovereignty concerns emanating from the

proliferation of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean. By harnessing these multidimensional policy instruments, the region can navigate the turbulent currents of an evolving multipolar order, safeguard its security interests, and uphold the sacrosanct principles of national sovereignty and democratic governance.

## **6. Strategic Guardianship: The Evolving Landscape of Chinese Private Security in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The burgeoning presence of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean represents a nuanced and multifaceted phenomenon, intricately woven into China's broader geopolitical tapestry. This expansion is not merely a response to immediate security concerns but a calculated move that aligns with China's long-term strategic interests, global ambitions, and the imperative to safeguard its burgeoning investments in increasingly volatile regions.

### **6.1. Strategic Imperatives and the Belt and Road Initiative**

At the heart of this expansion lies the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's ambitious global infrastructure development strategy. The deployment of PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean serves as a critical component in ensuring the success of BRI projects, creating a symbiotic relationship between economic ventures and security provision. This strategic coupling not only protects Chinese assets and personnel but also projects an image of China as a responsible global actor capable of ensuring stability in its spheres of influence.

The presence of these security entities extends beyond mere physical protection, functioning as *de facto* extensions of Chinese soft power. By providing security services, these companies foster deeper engagement with local communities and authorities, potentially influencing perceptions of China's role in the region. This multifaceted approach to security provision underscores China's evolving strategy in international relations, blending economic incentives with security assurances to cement its global standing.

### **6.2. Navigating a Complex Security Landscape**

The Latin American and Caribbean security environment presents a unique set of challenges for Chinese PSCs. The region's heterogeneous landscape, characterized by varying levels of political stability, socioeconomic disparities, and the prevalence of organized crime, necessitates a highly adaptive security approach. Recent incidents involving attacks on Chinese nationals and infrastructure projects underscore the volatile nature of the operating environment.

These security challenges are compounded by the region's complex historical and cultural contexts, which Chinese PSCs must navigate with sensitivity. The potential for misunderstandings or cultural friction adds another layer of complexity to their



operations, requiring these companies to develop nuanced strategies that balance effective security provision with cultural awareness and local sensitivities.

### **6.3. Legal and Regulatory Quagmire**

The legal framework governing the operations of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean is a labyrinthine construct of international, national, and local regulations. The extraterritorial application of China's national intelligence law introduces a particularly thorny issue, potentially placing these companies in a precarious position between their obligations to the Chinese state and the laws of host countries.

This legal ambiguity is further complicated by the evolving nature of international private security regulations. As these companies operate in a gray area between private entities and state actors, questions of accountability, transparency, and jurisdiction become increasingly pertinent. The potential for legal disputes and jurisdictional conflicts looms large, necessitating careful diplomatic navigation and potentially new international legal frameworks to address these emerging challenges.

### **6.4. Geopolitical Implications and Regional Dynamics**

The proliferation of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean is reshaping regional security dynamics in profound ways. Their presence introduces a new variable into the complex equation of regional power relations, potentially altering the strategic calculus of both host countries and competing global powers.

For host nations, the presence of these security entities presents both opportunities and challenges. While they may provide much-needed security services and contribute to local economies, their operations also raise questions about sovereignty and the long-term implications of relying on foreign security providers. This dynamic could potentially influence domestic politics and foreign policy orientations in the region.

From a broader geopolitical perspective, the expansion of Chinese PSCs in the Western Hemisphere may be perceived as a strategic encroachment by other global powers, particularly the United States. This perception could catalyze a reevaluation of security partnerships and alliances in the region, potentially leading to increased competition or even confrontation in the security sector.

### **6.5. Future Trajectories and Policy Considerations**

As Chinese PSCs continue to establish their presence in Latin America and the Caribbean, their role is likely to evolve in response to emerging threats, technological advancements, and shifting geopolitical realities. The integration of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and drone surveillance, could significantly enhance their operational capabilities while simultaneously raising new ethical and legal questions.

Policymakers, security analysts, and scholars must adopt a multidisciplinary approach to fully grasp the implications of this phenomenon. This requires not only

a deep understanding of security dynamics but also insights into economic trends, cultural nuances, and the evolving nature of global governance.

**6.6. Moving forward, several key areas warrant close attention:**

6.6.1. The development of international regulatory frameworks specifically addressing the operations of transnational PSCs.

6.6.2. The impact of these security entities on regional stability and interstate relations.

6.6.3. The long-term implications for China's global security posture and its relationship with the Global South.

6.6.4. The potential for cooperation or conflict between Chinese PSCs and local security forces.

6.6.5. The role of technology in shaping the future of private security operations.

Accordingly, the expansion of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean represents a significant shift in the global security landscape. As this trend continues to unfold, it will be crucial for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue, fostering transparency and cooperation to ensure that the presence of these entities contributes positively to regional security and development. The coming years will undoubtedly shed more light on the true impact of this strategic guardianship, potentially reshaping our understanding of global security dynamics in the 21st century.

### **Closing Remarks: The Multifaceted Impact of Chinese Private Security Companies in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The expansion of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Latin America and the Caribbean represents a complex phenomenon that reflects evolving global security dynamics in the 21st century. This development blurs traditional distinctions between state and private actors, economic interests and security concerns, and regional and global influences. It also highlights the interplay between operational realities and public perception in shaping policy and opinion.

The presence of Chinese PSCs in this region raises critical questions about power dynamics, sovereignty in an interconnected world, and the future of international security cooperation. The deployment of these entities can be viewed as a response to legitimate security challenges faced by Chinese investments and personnel in potentially unstable environments. It reflects China's expanding global economic footprint and its efforts to protect its interests abroad. Additionally, it may provide host countries with additional resources and expertise to address complex security issues. However, this expansion also introduces new complexities to regional politics and security landscapes. It potentially challenges conventional notions of a state monopoly on the use of force and raises concerns about accountability and

transparency in security operations. The presence of foreign private security actors, particularly those with potential ties to a major global power, may influence regional geopolitical balances and domestic political dynamics in host countries.

A notable aspect of this phenomenon is the discrepancy between media portrayals of Chinese security personnel as armed protagonists and the operational reality of unarmed PSCs relying on local partnerships. This disparity serves multiple functions, including preparing the Chinese public for a more assertive global presence while managing expectations about current capabilities. It also raises questions about the influence of such portrayals on policy decisions and public perceptions in host countries.

From a broader perspective, the phenomenon of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean exemplifies larger global trends. It underscores the increasing privatization of security, the growing influence of non-Western powers in regions traditionally dominated by Western influence, and the complex relationship between economic development and security provision in developing regions. Furthermore, it demonstrates the significant role of media and popular culture in shaping narratives around national security and global engagement.

As this situation evolves, it will be essential for all stakeholders—including Chinese authorities, host country governments, regional organizations, and the international community—to engage in substantive dialogue and cooperation. The objective should be to establish robust frameworks that ensure these security operations contribute to regional stability while respecting national sovereignty and international norms. This process must also consider the impact of media representations and public perceptions on policy-making and international relations.

The trajectory of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean may have significant implications for how emerging powers project influence and protect their interests globally, how host countries manage the presence of foreign security actors, and how the international community adapts its legal and normative frameworks to address these new realities. The portrayal of these companies in media and popular culture, both in China and internationally, will likely play a role in shaping these outcomes. Moving forward, continued research, analysis, and dialogue will be crucial. A comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon—one that considers its strategic, economic, legal, cultural, and media dimensions—is necessary for policymakers and scholars to address the challenges and potential opportunities presented by this development in global security dynamics. This approach should include a critical examination of how media narratives and public diplomacy efforts shape opinion and policy decisions, both in China and in the countries where these PSCs operate.

Finally, the expansion of Chinese PSCs in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with their complex media portrayal, offers a valuable case study in the evolving

nature of global security, international relations, and public diplomacy in the contemporary era. As China navigates the challenges of protecting its overseas interests while managing its global image, the role of PSCs—and their representation in media and popular culture—will likely remain a subject of significant academic and policy interest on the international stage.

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