

Decoupling between China and Latin America? The Competition and Containment of the US against China in the Energy Field in Latin America under the Sino-US Game

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the battlefield of Sino-US competition and confrontation has been extended to other countries and regions. The US has always regarded Latin America as its “backyard” and its traditional sphere of influence. In the past two decades, China-Latin America relations have experienced sustained and rapid development, and China has become a dominant force and major influence in Latin America. Since Trump, the US government has continuously interfered in the development of China-Latin America relations, re-announced the “Monroe Doctrine” and maintained its hegemonic status in the Americas. And the US has taken various measures to interfere in China-Latin America relations. Energy relations are the new focus of China-Latin America relations and also the focus of US intervention. Therefore, this paper will explore the strategic competition and containment strategies of the US against China in the energy sector in Latin America since 2017 under Trump and Biden. The research identifies the US’s direct intervention measures, such as diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and public diplomacy campaigns, as well as indirect competitive strategies like financial incentives, multilateral alliances, and technical assistance. However, the energy sector’s vitality and the mutual benefits it offers have positioned Latin America as more than just a field for Sino-US competition. There is still space for continued and expanded China-Latin America cooperation.

KEYWORDS

Sino-US Competition; Sino-Latin America Relation; US Containment and Competition; Energy Field.

1. INTRODUCTION

China-US relations have entered a stage of great power competition and confrontation. Since Trump took office, the U.S. has made major adjustments to its China policy. In December 2017, the Trump administration’s first *National Security Strategy* explicitly defined China as a strategic competitor. On a global scale, the US has begun to actively cope with China’s gradually expanding influence and comprehensively upgrade its strategic suppression and containment against China. After Biden came to power, although the US strategy and approach to China have changed to some extent, the competitive and confrontational nature of the relationship has not changed. As the competition intensifies, the battlefield of the Sino-US game has been extended to other countries and regions.

Since 2017, when Latin American countries joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Latin America relations have experienced sustained and rapid development. Since 2017, Latin America has gradually become an important participant and beneficiary of BRI. China-Latin America cooperation has been strengthened and the relations have been upgraded. Today, of the 26 countries in the region with diplomatic relations, 22 have signed a memorandum of understanding with China to jointly build

BRI. In recent years, China's proactive engagement in Latin America's energy sector, through investments, infrastructure projects, and long-term agreements, has considerably expanded its influence in the region. This has raised concerns in the US, where energy security and geopolitical dominance have traditionally been interlinked with access to and control over energy resources in its neighboring regions.

The US has always regarded Latin America as its "backyard" and its traditional sphere of influence and has a long-term and huge influence on Latin America. The US is the largest trading partner and the largest source of outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) for Latin America. For nearly two decades, the US has been treating Latin America as a tool to serve its internal affairs, focusing on issues of internal and external linkage such as immigration and anti-drug, while making little progress on the livelihood issues that Latin Americans care about. Latin Americans' sense of independence is awakening, and contradictions and conflicts in US-Latin America relations are on the rise. During the Trump era, the US has significantly adjusted its policy toward Latin America and returned to the "Monroe Doctrine", which signifies more open interference and a stronger orientation of xenophobia. The US would resort to more direct political, economic, and even military means to curb the expansion of influence of non-regional powers (mainly China and Russia) in Latin America. As Trump said at the 73rd Session of the United National General Assembly, "It has been the formal policy of our country since President Monroe that we reject the interference of foreign nations in this hemisphere and in our own affairs." Trump has emphasized "America first" and forced Latin American countries to obey the interests of the US through interference in their internal affairs, inducement, and even intimidation, which has seriously affected the economic and social development of Latin American countries. The U.S. regards Latin America as the most stable basic disk in its global strategic layout, which means that the strategic space of China-Latin America relations is not only determined by China-Latin America relations, but also affected by US-Latin America relations and China-US relations. Therefore, once other countries from outside the region enter Latin America, their relations with Latin America are no longer purely bilateral relations, but form a trilateral relationship including the US [1].

China's growing influence in Latin America looms large, second only to the US in terms of commercial exchanges and influence [2]. In the past two decades, China has become a dominant force and major influence in Latin America from a marginal player. In certain key sectors, especially power generation, telecommunications, and infrastructure, China has outpaced the US [3]. In the context of the increasing competition between China and the US, the rising energy relations between China and Latin America are bound to arouse the concern of the US. Therefore, the US would intervene in China-Latin America relations to maintain its absolute control and leadership position in Latin America. According to the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, "China and Russia target their investments in the developing world to expand influence and gain competitive advantages against the United States." And "China seeks to pull the region into its orbit through state-led investments and loans." The US believes that the energy cooperation between China and Latin America is politically motivated, which threatens the US security interests in the region.

At present, the competition between China and the US is intensifying. Since Trump, the US government has continuously interfered in the development of China-Latin America relations, re-announced the "Monroe Doctrine" and maintained its hegemonic status in the Americas. The U.S. has taken various measures to interfere in China-Latin America relations in the political, economic, military, cultural, and other fields. Energy relations are the new focus of China-Latin America relations and are the focus of US intervention. Therefore, this paper will focus on the energy field and explore the US intervention in Sino-Latin American energy relations since 2017.

By focusing on the energy sector, this study aims to elucidate the complex dynamics of Sino-US competition in Latin America, highlighting the strategic maneuvers, policies and implications of their interactions. By analyzing the counterbalance and containment of the US against China in Latin America, it will help to better grasp the challenges and practical obstacles to future China-Latin

America cooperation and the construction of the China-Latin America community of shared future, how to cope with the US interference in China-Latin America relations, and make good use of the BRI to strengthen the cooperation between China and Latin America.

As an important part of South-South cooperation, China-Latin America cooperation has a solid foundation and broad space for development. It provides a model for building a new type of international relations and is an important reference for developing countries. By exploring the US interference in China-Latin America relations, it is helpful to find appropriate countermeasures, reduce the negative spillover effect of great power competition on regional development, and provide a good model for the sustainable development of developing countries and regions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the research subjects and research questions, this part will review relevant research and studies and is mainly divided into the following dimensions.

2.1. Research on Sino-US Game

The competition between China and the US has become the focus of global attention. Scholars and research institutions have conducted extensive discussions and research on this issue. This part will mainly focus on China-US competition in other areas of the world.

Dunford and Liu (2023) [4] reviewed the evolution of China's international engagement since the 1970s. China's presence in some areas causes threat to the US and the US is to contain China economically and militarily with trade and technology restrictions, culturally and politically with information wars and alliances. In East Asia, the military competition and strategic game between China and the US have attracted much attention. Bader (2020) [5] pointed out that in this competition, the balance of power and geopolitical factors played key role. In Africa, the competition is focused on the economic, political, and security spheres. Zweig and Hao (2019) [6] argued that China's growing influence in Africa has alarmed the US and other Western countries. In Central Asia, the rivalry between China and the US spans energy, infrastructure, and geopolitics. The positions and strategies of Central Asian countries are crucial [7]. Finally, in Latin America, as Admiral Tidd (2018) [8] said, the US is "no longer the only game in town" in the region, and its adversaries are engaged in "indirect assaults" on US interests to broaden the competitive spaces in the hemisphere. Farah and Babineau (2019) [2] pointed out that Russia, China, and Iran to a lesser extent are engaging in the Latin American area. Each has different interests in this region, causing concerns in the US. According to Berg and Ziemer (2023) [3], China has arrived at such an advantageous position and is getting to outcompete the US in the area. They also give some recommendations to cope with China's influence, such as enlarging investment in energy security and increasing trade with Latin America.

2.2. Research on China-Latin America Cooperation

With China's accession to the WTO in 2001, China-Latin America economic and trade relations have opened a new era. Since 2017, when Latin American countries joined BRI, China-Latin America relations have undergone rapid development.

2.2.1. In Terms of Economic and Trade Cooperation

Economic and trade cooperation is the core content of the current China-Latin America relations. Boston University Global Development Policy Center has released *the China-Latin America Economic Bulletin* for several consecutive years, showing the categories and amounts of import and export goods, investment volume, and future trend of economic cooperation between the two sides.

According to Wu (2015) [9], China-Latin America relations are being upgraded. Although there are still problems such as mutual understanding to be strengthened and mutual trust, by 2014, China-Latin America cooperation has reached an unprecedented level in speed, breadth, and depth, and China-Latin America relations are moving towards a new stage of “sharing the same breath and sharing the same destiny”. In the book *China on the Ground in Latin America: Challenges for the Chinese and Impacts on the Region*, Ellis (2014) [10] gave a detailed description of the current situation of economic and political exchanges between China and Latin America and pointed out that besides economic exchanges such as direct investment, the social exchanges are also deepening and would affect the overall cooperation between two sides. Spanish scholars Javier Vadell (2019) [11], and Dosch and Goodman (2012) [12] proposed that China’s current role in Latin America is mainly as an economy, but that China-Latin America cooperation is moving beyond mere economic cooperation and will gradually involve social, political, and cultural cooperation.

Most scholars hold a positive and optimistic attitude towards the future trend of China-Latin America economic and trade cooperation. Scholars like Niu (2016) [13] and Bi (2015) [14] looked forward to the future of China-Latin America cooperation and stressed the need to further deepen bilateral economic and trade cooperation in various aspects such as adjusting the industrial structure, formulating policies, improving cooperation mechanisms and strengthening local cooperation.

2.2.2. In Terms of Cultural and People-to-people Exchanges

Economic relations should not be the sole criterion to judge the closeness of China-Latin America relations, and the two sides should further enrich the content of relations and deepen comprehensive cooperation and mutual understanding.

In recent years, with the promotion and deepening of the overall China-Latin America cooperation, the people-to-people and cultural exchanges have attracted more scholars’ attention. Lin (2007) [15] summarized the cultural exchanges between China and Latin America since the mid-16th century, including the exchange of goods initially through new shipping routes and the cultural exchanges promoted by Chinese laborers and overseas Chinese after the 19th century. Cui and Xu (2018) [16] sorted out basic information about overseas Chinese in Latin America and believed that Chinese and overseas Chinese have a strong influence on cultural exchanges and can promote mutual learning and cooperation between Chinese and Latin American civilizations, expand channels of cultural exchanges, and enhance the national image. However, Guo (2016) [17] pointed out that the development of people-to-people exchanges has long lagged behind the development of political and economic relations and has become a bottleneck for the sustainable development of China-Latin America relations. Zhao (2017) [18] emphasized the importance of building and shaping the shared values and perceptions between the Chinese and Latin American people. Xu (2019) [19] also proposed to deepen people-to-people exchanges between China and Latin America, respect differences, and seriously consider China’s role and positioning in Latin America.

2.2.3. In Terms of Cooperation in the Security Field

In addition, some research in the security field also exists. Ellis (2020) [20] argued that military engagement is an officially acknowledged and important part of China and Latin America’s interactions. The relationship is bolstered by training, institutional exchanges, professional military education, and other interactions involving military equipment.

2.3. Research on China-Latin America Relations in the Context of Sino-US Game

2.3.1. American Views on China’s Presence in Latin America

In recent years, American academic circles have paid great attention to the rapid development of China-Latin America relations, believing that the proximity between the two sides leads to the estrangement of the US and Latin America. Cui and Zhang (2018) [21] elaborated on American

scholars' analysis of China's role positioning, interest demands, and strategic influence in Latin America from different aspects and put forward countermeasures to check and contain China.

Two different views of China's presence in Latin America exist. Hawkish scholars believe that China's growing influence in Latin America has caused a big shock to the US. China's growth and increasing international engagement were regarded as a threat [22][23]. The rapid development of China-Latin America relations will have a negative impact on the US, and even affect America's leading position and hegemony in the Western Hemisphere [24][25]. Locatelli (2010) [26] argued that China's political and diplomatic presence in Latin America weakens the geopolitical advantage of the US. All of China's behaviors in Latin America serve the major strategic goal of strengthening China's regional influence and leadership, which is to challenge and destroy the current international order in the Western hemisphere dominated by the US [10]. Slipak (2014) [27] found that many Latin American countries took trade and investment exchanges with China as their central agenda. There is a general trend in Latin America from the "Washington Consensus" to the "Beijing Consensus". China is challenging the US's ability to set "the rules, the norms, and the institutions" [28].

However, many scholars believe that China's presence in Latin America is conducive to the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole and is also in the interests of the US. MacFarlane (2015) [29] believed that the US should encourage China to invest in LAC countries. Because China's demand for natural resources promoted economic growth, which stimulated the demand for US exports. Dollar (2006) [30] mentioned that China pursues a pragmatic foreign policy in Latin America, which mainly highlights economic and commercial interests. China is primarily an economic competitor and seeks to expand its influence and build long-term economic relations with any willing partner in the area [2]. It is a false fear to see China as a threat to US interests in Latin America, and China has no intention of transplanting its political system, ideology, or development model to Latin America [31]. In general, the US views China as a geopolitical competitor in the Americas, not a partner.

2.3.2. U.S. Interference in China-Latin America Relations

In early 2006, Hakim (2006) [32] argued that many Latin Americans regarded China as an alternative to US hegemony. The US government has paid increasing attention to China's role and presence in the region and expressed its willingness to handle the trilateral relationship with China and Latin America in a cooperative and dialogue manner. The Bush era witnessed a rapid development of China-Latin America economic and trade cooperation. However, China's presence in the region has not been regarded as a threat. During the Obama era, the main theme between the US and China was cooperation, but the US began to be alert to China's presence in LAC countries [33]. After the establishment of the China-CELAC Forum in 2015, the US Congress held several hearings to assess the impact of China's actions in the region on the US. Although the US government was already highly concerned about China's actions in Latin America at that time, it did not take steps to openly impede Sino-Latin American cooperation. After Trump took office, his China policy underwent a major shift, not only listing China as a strategic competitor, but also taking multiple measures to suppress China, including interfering with China-Latin America relations, turning Latin America into a new battlefield for Sino-US game [34]. Yan (2020) [35] pointed out that Trump would not allow external forces to enter Latin America to infringe on the American hegemony in the area.

The change of American policy toward Latin America has a significant impact on China-Latin America relations [36]. The gradual decline of the US economic presence in Latin America is a manifestation of Washington's hegemonic attrition in the world. American concerns over the Chinese incursion in Latin America could change the region into a scenario of geopolitical dispute between the two great powers, which affects cooperation between China and Latin America [37].

Cao (2020) [34] introduced American measures to obstruct China-Latin America cooperation from the political point of view, including intensifying the attack on the leftist regimes in Latin America, drawing in the right-wing regimes to form the "anti-China camp", warning the Latin American countries that have newly established diplomatic relations with China and so on. Cao and Cheng

(2023) [38] pointed out that the cooperation between China and Latin America faces many challenges, such as increased repression and obstruction by the US, and political and economic instability in Latin America. They put forward some countermeasures and suggestions to promote the upgrading of China-Latin America relations. According to Liu and Zhang (2021) [39], the Sino-US competition has a huge impact on the economic and political stability of Latin American countries. The Sino-US game in the field of science and technology has posed challenges to the 5G construction in Latin America, and the 5G issue in Latin America has gradually become politicized. The US interferes with China-Latin America 5G cooperation from the political, economic, rule and security dimensions [40]. Latin American countries are in a dilemma. Huang (2022) [41] discussed the essence and connotation of the China-Latin America Community with a Shared Future from the perspective of international political economy theory. America's interference and the cultural differences between China and Latin America are the main challenges to the construction of the community. Wang and Chen (2023) [42] argued that US-Latin America cooperation is security-oriented, with the US defending its absolute control over Latin America, while China-Latin America cooperation is development-oriented. They introduced the interaction between two sides in Latin America, and the cause, manners, and influence of the US's intervention in the economic cooperation between China and Latin America. Based on this, China should actively plan and formulate measures and policies to promote the positive interaction of the trilateral relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America and avoid falling into a "new Cold War" in Latin America.

2.4. Research on Trilateral Relationship between China, the US, and Latin America

China, the United States, and Latin America form important trilateral relationship in the Pacific Rim. When scholars discuss China-Latin America relations, most of them incorporate the US into the research framework and compare China with the US. Zhu (2010) [43] explained that the trilateral relationship has experienced three stages: before the Cold War, after the Cold War, and at the beginning of the 21st century. Since the 21st century, the three sides have frequently interacted with each other, featuring asymmetry, immaturity, complexity, great potential, and China's increasing role. Fan (2017) [44] focused on the interest game and balance between China and the US in Latin America, where both sides have different political and economic considerations. The characteristics of openness, interaction, and instability determine the dynamic and unbalanced nature of the trilateral relationship. Vadell (2019) [45], Dosch and Goodman (2012) [12], and Ratliff (2009) [46] respectively proposed that China could check the traditional hegemony of the U.S. in Latin America to a certain extent, and the influence of the US in Latin America declined accordingly. But Dosch and Goodman went on to argue that China's aid to Latin America has a strong commercial nature.

Zhou (2018) [47] argued that, in the trilateral relationship, two structural contradictions, namely, the discrepancy between US-China advantages in stock and increase in Latin America, and the contradiction between the "Monroe Doctrine" thinking between the US and Latin America and the unity and self-improvement of Latin America, have gradually become prominent, affecting the dynamic pattern of the three sides. Song and Fu (2021) [48] argued that at present, Sino-US relations soured to pull the negative impact of the trilateral relationship between China, the United States, and Latin America. The United States regards China as its main competitor in Latin America, and how to deal with China's presence and influence in Latin America has become an important part of its policy toward Latin America. They also introduced the new situation of trilateral interaction, the uncertainties and challenges in the development of trilateral relationship in the new stage of development, and finally gave the path thinking of the development of trilateral relationship.

2.5. Summary

Due to the colonial history of Latin America, Spanish is spoken in most Latin American countries, except for a few countries and regions. As a result, the study of Latin America is not short of Spanish books and articles by Spanish and Latin American scholars. With the help of some translation tools,

it can be seen that Spanish scholars generally believe that in the relations between China, the US, and Latin America, further Sino- Latin America cooperation will have a certain impact on the status of the US in Latin America. Therefore, the US would obstruct China-Latin America cooperation.

To sum up, research on the Sino-U.S. game, China-Latin America cooperation, and the trilateral relationship between China, America, and Latin America have been quite full and detailed. However, the research on the interference of the US in the Sino-Latin American cooperation is still insufficient. The existing research mainly focuses on a broad overview and lacks further detailed research on the specific field. Although some studies have focused on U.S. interference in China-Latin America cooperation in the economic and 5G sectors, there is a lack of research on interference in the energy sector. Under the current situation, further detailed research is the trend and of practical needs.

Therefore, this paper will analyze the counterbalance and containment of the US against China in Latin America in the energy field, explore American actions and intervention policies in China-Latin American energy relations, and finally explain the reasons and implications of American intervention.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

This paper will center on the following questions. (1) What are the American strategies and actions to compete and contain China in the energy field in Latin America? In what aspects and in what ways? (2) What are the reasons and implications of the US interference?

This paper will sort out all the measures and actions of the US since Trump took office by looking up the reports and documents published on the US websites and officers' speeches, classify them according to different aspects of concern, and then summarize the usual ways and methods and characteristics in each aspect.

4. THE BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE US'S CONTAINMENT AGAINST CHINA IN LATIN AMERICA

4.1. China-Latin America Energy Cooperation

Energy cooperation is the starting point of pragmatic cooperation between China and Latin America. Latin America is where Chinese energy companies first "go out". Over the past decade since the BRI was proposed, China-Latin America energy cooperation has shown strong vitality, making significant contributions to the economic and social development of both regions. In recent years, the momentum of China-Latin America energy cooperation has grown stronger and its coverage has become wider, achieving remarkable results.

On one hand, traditional fossil energy cooperation has been continuously deepening. In April 2022, the first phase of the Mero ultra-deepwater oil field, a global giant salt deposit project cooperated between China and Brazil, was successfully put into production. It is expected to reach a daily output of 180,000 barrels of crude oil, becoming a new milestone in China-Latin America oil and gas cooperation. In Ecuador, China National Petroleum Corporation Andes has been operating for 17 years, with a cumulative investment of over \$2.5 billion and a cumulative oil and gas production of 43.84 million tons, representing a bright spot in mutually beneficial energy cooperation between China and Ecuador. Chinese oil companies are present in almost all Latin American oil and gas-producing countries, such as Colombia, Argentina, and Guyana. Currently, China's investment in Latin American oil and gas has exceeded \$35 billion, covering the entire industrial chain from exploration and development to engineering technical services and oil and petrochemical trade.

On the other hand, China-Latin America cooperation in renewable energy has already begun to show its potential. Latin American countries are rich in new energy resources, and many consider the vigorous development of new energy as an important means to promote economic development.

China, with its full industrial chain advantages and rich project implementation experience, highlights the complementary advantages and enormous potential for cooperation between the two sides. In September 2020, the 300 MW Cauchari solar power project in Argentina, jointly constructed by PowerChina and Shanghai Electric, was put into operation, becoming the largest solar power station in Argentina. In Argentina, the Romablan wind farm near Puerto Madryn is one of the largest wind farms in the country. This wind farm project is divided into six phases, with the first, second, third, and sixth phases, as well as the Miramar wind farm in Buenos Aires Province, all invested and constructed by China's Goldwind, collectively forming the Helios wind power project cluster.

Moreover, critical minerals related to new energy development have also become a new focus of cooperation in recent years. In northern Chile, Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD invested \$290 million to build a lithium cathode battery plant. In Bolivia, in December 2023, a lithium carbonate plant project constructed by Chinese enterprises was completed. President Luis Arce attended the ceremony and stated that this marks the country's formal entry into the process of lithium industrialization. In April 2023, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed around 20 agreements to strengthen their already close relationship, including in the areas of trade, climate change, and energy transition.

Furthermore, infrastructure projects related to energy are being actively carried out. China Southern Power Grid is preparing Chile's first high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line. As China Southern Power Grid's largest overseas greenfield investment project to date, this 1,350-kilometer transmission line will become an important achievement of the China-Chile collaboration under the BRI, contributing to Chile's green development.

China's proactive policy and substantial investments in Latin America's energy sector have yielded significant achievements. Long-term energy supply agreements with Latin American countries have bolstered China's energy security and diversified its energy sources. Chinese investments have driven the development of crucial energy infrastructure, contributing to economic growth, green transition and improving energy access and efficiency in Latin America.

4.2. The US-Latin America Energy Cooperation

In recent years, the US and Latin American countries have engaged in significant cooperation within the energy sector. This collaboration has not only bolstered the energy capacities of Latin American nations but also contributed to the strategic interests of the US in the region.

In terms of traditional fossil energy, the US has been deeply involved in the exploration and production of oil and gas in Latin America. Following Mexico's 2013 energy reforms, US companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron have significantly invested in the region's oil fields and offshore drilling projects. This partnership has revitalized Mexico's oil sector, fostered technological exchange and increased production capacities. In Brazil, American oil companies have played a crucial role in developing the pre-salt oil fields, which are among the most significant offshore discoveries in recent years. The investments and expertise of US firms have been pivotal in unlocking these resources, enhancing Brazil's position as a leading oil producer. Similarly, in Argentina, US support has been instrumental in developing the Vaca Muerta shale formation. Companies such as ExxonMobil and Chevron have invested heavily in shale gas exploration and production, helping Argentina to leverage its vast unconventional gas reserves and improve energy security.

Renewable energy cooperation has also seen remarkable progress. In Mexico, notable investments by firms such as AES and First Solar have led to the development of extensive wind and solar power projects. These initiatives have significantly contributed to Mexico's renewable energy capacity, aligning with the country's goals for sustainable development. Chile, renowned for its solar energy potential, has benefited from American expertise and investment. Projects like the Cerro Dominador solar thermal plant exemplify the successful collaboration between the two regions. Additionally, American firms have supported Chile's ambitious renewable energy targets by contributing to various

solar and wind projects across the country. Colombia has also experienced substantial US involvement in its renewable energy sector, like the development of the Ituango Dam.

Also, the cooperation extends to critical minerals essential for renewable energy technologies. In Chile, the US has shown a keen interest in the lithium and copper industries, vital for battery production and other technological applications. American company Albemarle has made significant investments in Chile's lithium sector, ensuring a steady supply of this crucial mineral for the burgeoning electric vehicle market. This engagement underscores the strategic importance of Latin American resources in global supply chains and the energy transition. Peru, another key player in the mining sector, has witnessed American investment in its copper mines. Companies like Freeport-McMoRan have been active in large-scale mining operations, contributing to Peru's position as a leading copper producer.

Moreover, collaboration between the US and Latin America extends to energy-related infrastructure projects. In Brazil, the US has partnered on modernizing the electrical grid to enhance efficiency and integrate renewable energy sources. Companies like General Electric have been involved in supplying advanced technology and expertise for these upgrades, facilitating Brazil's energy transition. In Mexico, US companies have invested in developing pipelines and refineries to boost the capacity and efficiency of the oil and gas sector. The construction of cross-border pipelines has particularly enhanced energy trade between the US and Mexico, underscoring the strategic importance of infrastructural investments [49].

The cooperation between the US and Latin American countries in the energy sector is multifaceted and robust. They not only enhance the energy security and economic growth of Latin America but also align with the US strategic interests, fostering deeper regional integration and mutual benefits.

4.3. Reasons of the US's Containment

The increasing involvement of China in Latin America's energy sector has prompted a strategic response from the US, aiming to contain China's growing influence. This part will make a detailed analysis of the reasons why the US interferes in China-Latin America energy cooperation.

4.3.1. Great Power Competition

The global competition between the US and China is evident in many regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean. Containing China's influence in LAC is part of a broader strategy to counter China's rise as a global power [50]. The US views Latin America as a region of strategic importance due to its geographical proximity and historical ties. Latin America has traditionally been considered within the US sphere of influence, and growing Sino-Latin American cooperation impacts US dominance in the region. According to LaFranchi, the increasing activities and cooperation between China and LAC would lead to "closer political and even security ties".

According to power transition theory, the stability of the international system relies on the continuity of the dominant power's status. As an emerging power challenges the position of the existing dominant power, the likelihood of conflict increases [51]. The US, as the global hegemon, views its dominance in the Western Hemisphere as crucial for its strategic security and economic interests [52]. China's energy investments and presence in Latin America are perceived as a direct challenge to US regional hegemony. By intervening and counterbalancing China's actions, the US aims to maintain its global and regional influence [53].

4.3.2. Economic Interests

1) Control Strategic Assets and Enhance Energy Security

Latin America possesses abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, and critical minerals essential for modern technologies. In the field of renewable energy, Latin America boasts abundant renewable energy resources. With long hours of sunlight and strong solar radiation, as well as high wind density,

countries like Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina possess some of the best wind and solar resources in the world. Latin America also has substantial hydropower resources. The Amazon River is the largest in the world by discharge volume, drainage basin, and number of tributaries. More than half of the region's electricity supply comes from hydropower, with countries such as Brazil, Paraguay, Panama, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Colombia deriving over 60% of their total electricity generation from hydropower-double the global average [54]. In the realm of fossil fuels, Latin America holds about 15% of the world's oil and gas resources, with Venezuela having the world's largest proven oil reserves. The region is also a major exporter of natural gas, with Bolivia and Peru playing significant roles [55]. Moreover, Latin America is rich in strategical and critical minerals essential for renewable energy technologies and electric vehicles. The region holds significant reserves of lithium, bauxite, cobalt, tin, and titanium. According to data from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the total global lithium resources are estimated at around 80 million tons, with approximately 17 million tons considered to be economically extractable reserves. These lithium resources are primarily distributed across South America, Australia, China, Africa, and Europe. South America holds the largest share of the world's lithium reserves, estimated to account for 58% of the global total. Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, known as the "Lithium Triangle," possess nearly half of the world's lithium resources [56].

Energy security remains a critical concern for the US. Diversifying energy sources and securing reliable supply chains are essential for national security. Latin America's rich energy resources offer a strategic opportunity for the US to enhance its energy security and reduce dependence on external sources. By competing with China in Latin America's energy sector, the US seeks to protect its economic interests and maintain access to these vital resources. And by ensuring that these resources are not monopolized by Chinese firms, the US aims to prevent potential supply disruptions and mitigate the risks associated with overreliance on any single country, particularly a strategic competitor like China [57].

2) Maintain Technological Competition and Market Dynamics

China's advancements in renewable energy technologies and its dominance in the production of key components such as solar panels and wind turbines have significant implications for the global energy market. Chinese companies have a competitive edge due to lower production costs and extensive experience in deploying renewable energy projects. The US seeks to protect its economic interests by ensuring that American companies maintain their market share in the LAC energy sector. Chinese investments and partnerships can undermine US companies' competitive edge [58]. US companies view Latin America as a lucrative market for their energy technologies and services, and thus, countering Chinese investments helps safeguard these commercial opportunities [59].

In the electric vehicle (EV) sector, competition is intensifying. China has become a major investor in Latin America's critical minerals sector, essential for developing EV batteries. For example, in 2018, China's Tianqi Lithium purchased a 23% share in one of Chile's largest lithium producers, Sociedad Química y Minera (SQM), and in 2022, Ganfeng Lithium acquired a major evaporative lithium project in Argentina for \$962 million [60]. By limiting Chinese access to these resources, the US aims to hinder the growth of China's EV industry.

4.3.3. A Sense of Displacement

While Latin America generally does not face absolute energy security issues, its energy industry has several weak points. These include insufficient oil refining capacity, underdeveloped oil and gas pipelines, and inadequate electricity infrastructure investment. China, with its robust capabilities in these areas, is well-positioned to assist Latin American countries in overcoming these challenges. China's leadership in renewable energy technology, particularly in hydroelectric and wind power, is significant. China is home to five of the twelve largest hydroelectric power stations globally, all operated by China Yangtze Power, and operates 70% of the world's 700,000 kW and above hydroelectric generating units.

China's technological prowess and cost advantages in renewable energy projects often make it a more attractive partner for Latin American countries. This is particularly evident in countries where there is a need for investment and expertise in renewable energy infrastructure. The strong ties between China and Latin America often lead Latin American countries to seek assistance from China rather than the US. This dynamic can contribute to a sense of displacement in the US, as its traditional influence in the region is challenged.

For decades, Washington has halfheartedly sought to reach out to Latin America, only to be distracted by terrorists, the Taliban, or trade wars. A lack of concerted attention from the U.S. government and private actors has prompted Latin America and the Caribbean governments to look east for development assistance and a more reliable trade partner. China-Latin America energy cooperation has expanded significantly, encompassing exploration and development, oil trade, engineering services, equipment manufacturing, and new energy. This cooperation has created extensive vertical and horizontal linkages within the energy industry, highlighting numerous points of shared interest. For China, Latin America serves as a strategic alternative source of crude oil imports, enhancing its energy security. Conversely, Latin American resource-rich countries view China as a vital partner to ensure the security of their exports. In recent years, Latin American attitudes towards the US have become increasingly negative, with a desire to break free from U.S. control. The left-wing anti-American sentiment in Latin America seems to be experiencing a resurgence. The governance of leftist parties has strengthened anti-American sentiment in the region, with nationalist-leaning Latin American leftists advocating for alternatives to the U.S.-dominated neoliberal development strategy, emphasizing developmental independence. China's growing influence causes the US to feel a strong sense of displacement, concern and anxiety.

In general, the US response to China's growing influence in Latin America's energy sector is driven by a combination of geopolitical, economic, security, technological concerns. By competing with and containing China's presence, the US seeks to maintain its influence and promote a stable and secure Latin America that aligns with its strategic objectives.

5. THE US STRATEGY TO COMPETE AND CONTAIN CHINA IN THE ENERGY FIELD IN LATIN AMERICA

5.1. Direct Intervention Measures

Diplomatic Pressure: The US leverages its historical alliances and strategic dialogues to persuade Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) governments to limit or reconsider their energy partnerships with China. This involves direct diplomatic engagements where US officials warn about the risks associated with Chinese investments, such as security threats, potential debt traps, and the dual-use nature of infrastructure like ports for military purposes [61]. Also, US diplomats actively lobby LAC governments to highlight the disadvantages of Chinese investments, including debt dependency, lack of transparency, and undue political influence [62]. These efforts aim to create a perception that Chinese investments pose significant risks to national sovereignty and economic stability.

Economic Sanctions and Trade Policies: The US threatens or implements trade barriers and tariffs to discourage LAC countries from forming energy partnerships with China. These trade policies are designed to create economic disincentives for LAC countries considering Chinese investment [63]. Also, the US imposes economic sanctions on countries or entities that engage in activities contrary to its interests, such as sanctions on Venezuelan oil which directly impact China's ability to cooperate with Venezuela in the energy sector.

Public Diplomacy and Information Campaigns: The US employs media and information campaigns to underscore the negative consequences of Chinese investments. For example, highlighting issues in Chinese-funded projects in Ecuador and other countries to tarnish the image of

the BRI [63]. An article in The Wall Street Journal titled “China’s Global Construction Projects Are Falling Apart” criticized several major infrastructure projects, including the Coca Codo Sinclair Hydroelectric Plant in Ecuador, accusing the BRI of quality issues [64].

Chinese-funded projects have come under fire for creating lasting environmental harm, including deforestation, pesticide toxication, and the mismanagement of delicate ecosystems. In Ecuador, for example, a copper mining project operated by the subsidiary of a Chinese state-owned company led to the displacement of local populations, land seizures, and environmental damage, according to the U.S. Foreign Affairs Committee. Despite these criticisms, Chinese investments remain attractive to many due to their relatively fewer conditions compared to Western loans, although critics warn that such dependence can lead economically unstable countries like Venezuela into “debt traps”.

In addition to media campaigns, the US engages in cultural exchanges, scholarships, and public diplomacy programs to counter China’s narrative in the region. The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, in its most recent report to Congress last year, underscored the potential challenges posed by Chinese investments in critical minerals, infrastructure, and even vaccine diplomacy in Latin America. What for years was seen as benign Chinese investment has increasingly come to be seen in Washington as nefarious. “The rapid expansion of the BRI in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) provides Beijing with new avenues to translate its economic influence into political capital” [65].

5.2. Indirect Competitive Measures

Financial Incentives and Aid: The US provides financial aid, loans, and investments as alternatives to Chinese financing, often through institutions like the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). This strategy aims to offer LAC countries viable financial options that do not tie them to Chinese economic policies. For example, by integrating Chile into the Inflation Reduction Act’s special preferential target country list, the U.S. demonstrates its commitment to supporting regional economies with favorable financing conditions.

Increased development assistance is utilized to bolster infrastructure and energy projects in LAC countries, providing a counterweight to Chinese investments. For example, initiatives like the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity aim to expand supply chains and boost economic growth while deepening US trade ties with the region. This partnership promises multi-sector, region-wide cooperation, involving 11 countries that account for approximately 90 percent of the GDP in the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, the Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (RELAC), launched in 2019, aims to achieve 70% renewable energy participation in the region’s energy mix by 2030. To support this goal, the U.S. should collaborate with individual states to fund renewable energy initiatives.

The U.S. has been proactive in fostering renewable energy projects in the LAC region. As Ryan C. Berg suggests, engaging the public sector, multilateral organizations, and private companies is crucial. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation should increase its financing for projects in the LAC, and initiatives like the U.S. Caribbean Partnership to Tackle Climate Change 2030 should be established to address climate-related concerns. A notable example of U.S. involvement in renewable energy is First Solar, a leading solar panel producer that has received substantial tax credits from the Inflation Reduction Act. Companies in the LAC, such as SunTerra Energy Solutions, are looking to partner with First Solar, highlighting the importance of excluding Chinese-manufactured panels from U.S.-funded projects [66].

Multilateral Institutions and Alliances: The US leverages its influence in international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank to shape lending practices and policies that may disadvantage Chinese-funded projects. By doing so, the U.S. aims to limit China’s financial reach and promote transparency and sustainable development practices in loan agreements (CSIS, 2023).

The U.S. engages with regional bodies like the Organization of American States (OAS) to promote policies that counteract China's influence. Through initiatives within these organizations, the U.S. seeks to advance its strategic interests and reinforce the political and economic stability of member countries, thereby reducing their dependence on Chinese investments.

“Connecting the Americas 2022”, aiming at enhancing regional integration and cooperation among the countries of the Americas, focuses on improving energy security, promoting sustainable energy development and fostering economic growth through enhanced connectivity and infrastructure. By supporting clean energy projects, the U.S. aligns with global sustainability goals and offers an alternative to Chinese investments and seeks to create a more integrated and resilient regional energy market that is less dependent on external influences, including China.

Launched in December 2019, the Growth in the Americas initiative seeks to encourage private sector investment in Latin America's energy and infrastructure sectors, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. Initially proposed in 2018 with a focus on energy infrastructure, it has since expanded to include telecommunications, energy, ports, roads, and airports. This initiative aims to reduce Latin American countries' reliance on Chinese investments by providing U.S. financial support and fostering private sector involvement. Under the mask of “helping Latin America's economic recovery” and other reasons, the US has also made it clear that it hopes to compete with China by investing in Latin America's energy, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, thereby weakening China's influence in the region.

The Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (RELAC), introduced in 2019, aims to achieve 70% renewable energy participation in the region's energy mix by 2030. This initiative underscores the U.S.'s commitment to promoting sustainable energy practices in the region.

In 2019, the U.S. launched the Energy Resource Governance Initiative (ERGI) with countries like Peru, Argentina, and Brazil. This initiative aims to share mining expertise and establish governance frameworks for the development of key minerals such as lithium, copper, and cobalt. The goal is to attract international investors and build resilient critical mineral supply chains.

Key minerals are crucial not only for defense industries but also for strategic emerging industries. The U.S. increasingly views securing the supply chain of key minerals as vital for maintaining its lead in the new technological revolution. Given that the U.S. relies heavily on imports for many critical minerals, particularly from China, it perceives significant risks in this dependency. Consequently, the U.S. has been actively engaging in “critical mineral diplomacy” and adopted nationalist policies, promoting policy coordination and industrial cooperation with allies to establish a global supply chain based on shared ideologies and values, and even hope to build a “metal NATO” to decouple LAC countries from China. The US has been actively forming alliances and partnerships focused on critical minerals like nickel, cobalt, lithium, zinc, and tin. The US aim to establish a supply chain free from Chinese influence and form some exclusive groups, promoting an ideologically aligned global supply chain structure. Also, recent studies suggest the concept of “ally-shoring,” where the U.S. should source essential materials from countries that share its democratic values to build more resilient supply chains. This approach could help address bottlenecks in the lithium supply chain by fostering closer cooperation with Latin American countries rich in critical minerals.

Technical Assistance and Expertise: The US offers technical assistance and expertise in energy technologies and best practices, providing an alternative to Chinese technological solutions. This includes collaborations on renewable energy projects and infrastructure development. Capacity-building initiatives help LAC countries develop their own energy sectors independently of Chinese assistance. Programs focusing on training and skill development in energy management and technology are part of this strategy.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE US'S CONTAINMENT AND INTERFERENCE

After analyzing the strategies employed by the US to contain and intervene in China in the LAC region in the energy sector, this chapter will try to explore the implications.

6.1. Implications for Latin America

Under the backdrop of the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China, the US's efforts to compete with and counteract China's influence in Latin America have significant implications for the region.

The US competition with China in Latin America's energy sector may lead to increased geopolitical tensions and strategic maneuvering, as countries navigate between the competing interests of the US and China. All of these competing interests have put Latin American leaders in a tricky position. As the rivalry intensifies, Latin American countries may face pressure to choose sides or navigate a delicate balancing act between the two powers. And as the US seeks to maintain its influence and counteract China's rise as a global power, Latin America becomes a critical battleground for shaping the future of international relations. The outcome of this rivalry could reshape the global order and influence the distribution of power and influence in the international system.

Also, it can have significant economic consequences for the region. On one hand, increased competition and counteraction may lead to enhanced investment and technological transfer as both powers vie for influence. However, it could also result in economic dependencies and vulnerabilities as Latin American countries become caught in the middle of great power competition. Moreover, the imposition of economic sanctions or restrictions by either the US or China could disrupt trade and investment flows, affecting the region's economic stability and growth prospects.

The US competition against China in Latin America's energy sector amidst the broader context of US-China rivalry has far-reaching implications for the region. From political alignments to economic dependencies and strategic considerations, Latin America finds itself at the center of great power competition, facing complex challenges and uncertainties as it navigates the shifting dynamics of global geopolitics.

6.2. Implications for China

The US competition and containment strategies against China in Latin America's energy domain have profound implications for China. The US's efforts to counter China's energy engagements may result in increased regulatory scrutiny, investment restrictions, or trade barriers imposed on Chinese firms by host countries under US influence. This could hinder China's access to energy resources and markets in the region, constraining its economic interests. As China continues its global search for oil and natural gas vital to its economic development, the US continues to ratchet up energy pressure on China. Also, intensified competition with the US may lead to market rivalry and pricing pressures. Chinese companies may face heightened competition from US counterparts, potentially impacting their market share and profitability in the region.

On the other hand, the US's containment actions could exacerbate diplomatic tensions between China and the US. Diplomatic disputes or confrontations arising from competing interests in the region may strain bilateral relations and hinder cooperation on other global issues. It may also contribute to strategic encirclement, limiting China's geopolitical maneuverability. This could entail increased US presence or security partnerships in the region, posing challenges to China's strategic interests. As the rivalry between the two powers escalates, China must navigate complex geopolitical realities, adapt its strategies, and explore new avenues to safeguard its interests in Latin America's energy field.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the strategic rivalry between the US and China in Latin America's energy sector is emblematic of a broader geopolitical contest. The US has employed a combination of direct and indirect measures to counter China's expanding influence. These measures range from diplomatic pressures and economic sanctions to competitive financial incentives and the leveraging of multilateral institutions. However, the energy sector's vitality and the mutual benefits it offers have positioned Latin America as more than just a field for Sino-US competition.

Some Latin American specialists argue that the U.S. efforts to curb China's presence in the region might be too late [67]. As noted by Jorge Heine, a former Chilean ambassador to Beijing, many Latin American countries need trade and modern infrastructure, roles in which they see China as more active and effective compared to the U.S. This sentiment underscores a significant challenge for U.S. foreign policy in the region and suggests that Latin America may indeed become a primary arena for Sino-U.S. competition [67]. Although Latin America is unlikely to completely align with the U.S. against China, given the tangible benefits derived from their partnership with China, the region could become a significant battleground for the Sino-U.S. zero-sum game, especially in strategic sectors like energy.

The future trajectory of China-Latin America relations will likely be shaped by a complex interplay of cooperation and competition. While the U.S. aims to reassert its influence in the region, the fundamental needs and priorities of Latin American countries for trade, investment, and infrastructure development align closely with what China can offer. This creates a significant space for continued and expanded China-Latin America cooperation.

The U.S. containment and competitive strategies offer several insights for China. Firstly, China needs to recognize the importance of tailoring its policies to address the core interests and needs of Latin American countries. By focusing on mutually beneficial and inclusive cooperation, China can strengthen its partnerships in the region despite U.S. interference. Additionally, China should continue to promote its model of open cooperation, which is not aimed against any third party but rather focuses on win-win outcomes and true multilateralism. China's approach should focus on enhancing effective collaboration tailored to the region's needs, rather than viewing it as merely an arena for geopolitical competition.

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