China-U.S.-Latin America:  
A New Triangle

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Since China, the United States and Latin America have been interacting increasingly in the global context in recent years, there emerges a noteworthy new triangle in the international political stage. The new triangle has an increasingly important influence on China-U.S. ties and China-Latin American relations, and also provides the potential for bilateral cooperation between China and the United States in Latin America.

**China policy toward Latin America: three goals and one principle**

China is the largest developing country in the Eastern Hemisphere and Latin America is the one and only developing region in the Western Hemisphere. Under new international circumstances, the development of the bilateral relations between China and Latin America is faced with new opportunities and challenges. The Chinese government regards its relations with Latin America from a strategic point of view and seeks to build and develop a comprehensive and cooperative partnership. *China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean*, which was the first ever policy paper on Latin America and the Caribbean region and was published by the Chinese government on November 5, 2008, proposed that China’s policy toward Latin America include three main goals:

- Politically, China will promote mutual respect and mutual trust, and expand common ground with Latin America.
- Economically, China will deepen cooperation and achieve win-win results with Latin America.
- Culturally, China and Latin America will draw on each other’s strengths to boost common progress and to intensify exchanges.
More importantly, the One China policy is the political basis for the establishment and development of relations between China and Latin America.

Clearly, these policy goals and principles are consistent with China’s policies and principles toward all other developing countries. Moreover, they are exoteric and transparent to the whole world. However, we see that owing to the drastic changes in Latin America and the steadily warming China-Latin America relationship in recent years, the U.S. seems to show increasing anxiety and suspiciousness about China’s intentions in its backyard. In fact, the Chinese government and people have no intention of challenging U.S. hegemony in the region.

**China Interests in Latin America: Four main interests**

As globalization and political multi-polarity develop, China and Latin America share much in terms of strategy, diplomacy and economy. For China, there are four main interests in Latin America.

1. Economic interest: China has been undergoing the process of modernization and needs to seek and explore new markets in order to keep up a high rate of growth. Latin America, with a population of more than 560 million and an economy of nearly $4 trillion, is a huge and attractive market for Chinese products.

2. Energy interest: China faces a shortage of natural resources, due in large part to its enormous population and rapid economic growth. At present, China’s coal, oil and gas reserves in per capita terms are only 70, 11 and 4 percent, respectively, of the world average. Latin America has rich natural resources, especially abundant oil, copper, iron
ore, soy, wheat and corn and others. There is no question that it is necessary for China to look for new reliable supply sources abroad.

3. Political interest: China and the Latin American nations are all developing countries and face the same historic tasks that aim to keep rapid and successive economic growth, realize the harmonious and sustainable balance between economy and society and become developed countries. Latin America is a potential partner in China’s ongoing quest to establish a just and harmonious world order.

4. Diplomatic interest: Of the 33 nations in Latin America, all but 12 countries have established formal diplomatic relationship with China. Latin America plays a major role in China’s campaign to convince other countries to withdraw diplomatic recognition of Taiwan as part of its high-priority goal of achieving peaceful reunification.

Of course, Latin America has four major interests in China:

----to diversify the market and reduce dependence on the U.S.;
----to seek political support;
----to attract direct investment from China;
----to acquire appropriate technology.

China-U.S. in Latin America: Common interests

Though there exist different ideas and points-of-view between China and the U.S. about Latin American affairs, both nations seek broad common interests in Latin America.

First, China and the U.S. both hope that Latin American countries keep their political
and social stability, that the voting processes can be carried out smoothly in the various nations, and that policies will be consistent and lasting. As such, Latin America can provide a favorable environment for trading and investment.

Next, China and the U.S. are willing to see that Latin America achieves rapid and sustained growth, poverty is diminished and more opportunities for employment are created, and trade and investment increase.

Additionally, China and the U.S. both hope that the energy market in Latin America can hold steady and not fluctuate, and unanimously believe that a stable energy market in Latin America will be favorable to their own interests.

At last, China and the U.S. both are unwilling to see any serious regional conflict in Latin America and hope to sustain peace and development in the Western Hemisphere.

**Several Suggestions for Triple-Wins**

In order to strengthen the exchange and cooperation between Beijing and Washington, the author brings forward several suggestions.

First, Beijing and Washington should maintain and enlarge the current mechanism of the Strategic Dialogue on the Latin American Agenda.

Second, perhaps China and the United States may consider enlarging the dialogue between the two sides into Three Party Talks so as to eliminate unnecessary misunderstandings and skepticism from Latin American nations.

Third, Beijing and Washington should take full advantage of the new platforms of cooperation, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).
Fourth, Chinese companies and enterprises should work together with their American, European, Japanese and other counterparts to explore resources and establish new markets in Latin America so as to create a multiple-win situation in the Latin American region.

Fifth, China should further strengthen the explanation of China’s policy toward Latin America through all kinds of occasions and channels so as to help the people of the Western Hemisphere understand China and the Chinese people.