



Thornhill Capital Global Newsletter - July 2015

Russia's ambitions in Latin America

Russia is seen by most as focusing its foreign policy in Crimea and the Middle East. Indeed, with moves on the eastern Ukrainian border, as well as expanding its relationship with Iran and Syria, many are surprised to learn that Russia is actively expanding its relationship to Latin America.

Russia involvement in Latin America is not new. In the 1960s the then Soviet Union was ideologically, financially, and militarily involved with Cuba and a number of other countries in the region. This involvement peaked with the Cuban missile crisis. From that point forward Russian involvement in Latin America gradually decreased and, in 2002, they closed their last remaining surveillance base in Cuba. Moving away from its emphasis on

military involvement in Latin America, Russia began to transform its efforts in the region into one involving commercial trade. In the case of Venezuela, primarily because of a relationship with then President Hugo Chavez, that trade involved the sale of arms and military contracts, which continued for the next decade. Russia has now expanded from that relationship in selling military-grade helicopters to Brazil and promoting a \$1 billion USD sale of missile systems to improve the country's defensive capabilities. Peru has also been approached to purchase Russian military equipment in the form of armored personnel carriers. However, Russia's goal goes beyond the sale of military hardware. At least three countries in Latin America have been approached to allow the presence of Russian military bases. It's important to note that these deals are unfinalized and may be political in nature rather than hard contracts under consideration.

One of the reasons for this is that the United States has been so focused elsewhere that it has not prioritized its foreign policy relationship with Latin America to the extent it should. As a result of this lack of involvement other countries, including Russia, have sought to expand their influence in the region. The solution is relatively straight forward in that the United States has to actively expand its foreign policy efforts to its neighbors to the South. The economic, cultural, and historical relationship between countries in the Americas is too important to ignore.

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