

## Latin America and Its Emergence onto the World Stage

Scribed by Erin Eckerd

R. Evan Ellis, a professor at the U.S. Army War College, addressed the Foreign Policy Association of Harrisburg on March 24 and spoke of Latin America's increasing engagement with countries outside the Western Hemisphere, focusing primarily on China, Russia and Iran.

Ellis, who holds a PhD in political science, is a research professor of Latin American studies at the college's Strategic Studies Institute. He has published more than 120 works, including the books *China in Latin America*, *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America*, and *China on the Ground in Latin America*. More than 80 FPA members attended his talk at the Radisson Hotel Harrisburg.

Touching on China and Latin America, Ellis described three phases in their relationship: From 2001 to 2008, there was an expansion of economic ties as China joined the World Trade Organization, although most transactions were in commodity goods. After 2008, China grew its physical presence in Latin America, becoming active in petroleum and mining operations in Argentina, Brazil and Cuba. In addition, China expanded its telecommunications business, increased arms sales, and developed space programs with Latin American countries. However, with the slowing Chinese economy, worries over environmental policies and concerns for security and protection, Latin America has begun to reduce, but not abandon, its relationship with China.

On Russia, Ellis said that relations dimmed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but were rejuvenated between 2007 and 2014. Since then, Russia has strengthened its ties with Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela, countries less friendly to the United States. Russia's influence in Latin America involves arms sales, oil and gas, hydropower, nuclear technology, mining, and space programs, particularly through GLONASS, an alternative to GPS systems.

Ellis said that in the past 10 years, two Iranian presidents have taken opposite approaches to Latin America. Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad employed anti-American rhetoric to become closer with Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and advance its nuclear capabilities. However, because of current President Hassan Rouhani's nuclear deal with the United States and her allies, Iran is now focused on improving trade ties around the globe.

Ellis said there are over 4.5 million Muslims living in Latin America and noted some worries over the radicalization of Latin American youth. He cited Mexican students' failed hacking collaboration with Iran and some extremists attempting to pose as Syrian refugees.

Ellis ended his presentation with the observation that while the U.S. does not normally give Latin America a high priority, the connection between geography, trade, and family ties make the region more important to American foreign policy than one may assume.

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May 10	Embassy Trip - China (Sold Out)
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