iberorus2025-G.007

Strategic Alignments and Defense Ties: Russia’s Military and Defense Relations with Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico

Erika K. Foscolo , Clara R. Fernandes

erika.foscolo17@gmail.com

This paper explores the evolution of defense relations between the Russian Federation and five key Latin American countries - Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico - focusing on bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as trade in defense goods and services, from the early 2000s to 2024. In an increasingly multipolar world marked by the erosion of Western dominance and the expansion of alternative global partnerships, Russia has leveraged military cooperation and defense diplomacy to strengthen its presence in Latin America. The study examines the nature and scope of defense-related agreements in areas such as military training, arms sales, technology transfer, joint exercises, and strategic dialogue. The findings point to highly asymmetrical engagement across the five countries. Venezuela stands out as Russia’s most significant defense partner in the region, with numerous arms deals, training programs, and military cooperation agreements - especially during the Chávez and Maduro administrations. Brazil, while maintaining a more autonomous and diversified defense posture, has engaged in technical dialogue and information-sharing through BRICS and limited bilateral channels. Chile and Mexico have shown little defense engagement with Russia, with cooperation largely confined to multilateral forums or diplomatic symbolism. Colombia, a close security partner of the United States, maintains minimal military interaction with Russia and has historically viewed Russian defense initiatives with caution. By integrating quantitative data on arms trade from Russia-Latin America Observatory (Ruslat) with qualitative analysis of defense agreements and geopolitical positioning, the paper argues that Russia's defense engagement in Latin America is part of a broader strategic logic that combines influence-building, soft balancing, and symbolic counter-hegemony. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on extra-regional military influence in Latin America and offers insights into how defense cooperation reflects deeper geopolitical realignments in the contemporary international system.