

## Researcher focuses on external nations' activities in Latin America

By Curt Keester 28 November 2018



*Dr. R. Evan Ellis, Research Professor of Latin American Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute, focuses much of his attention on external nations' activities in Latin America.*

**CARLISLE, Pa. (Nov. 28, 2018)** – Since 2014, Dr. R. Evan Ellis, has focused much of his attention on external nations' activities in Latin America. As the Research Professor of Latin American Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute, he integrates a career of U.S. Defense work with academic expertise to spotlight a critical development in U.S.-Latin American recent history.

“Currently China is, I would argue, the pure competitor that presents the most direct challenges to U.S. equities, not only in Asia, but globally,” said Ellis. China’s challenges are not only security challenges, he said. The holistic influences are linked to economic engagements; our neighbors choices for partnership; regional commitment to US-aligned, democratic institutions, or not; the degree to which the region is influenced by stable governance or by corruption. “In that mix, China basically challenges the

Building on his Purdue University doctorate in Political Science, he worked for many years providing support and model simulation for wargaming for Science Applications International Corporation. He worked with Army organizations, private industry clients and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, honing his understanding of public policy, building a professional network, and finding himself drawn to the comparative politics of Latin American countries.

“I began to follow Chinese activities in Latin America, something that was getting very little attention,” said Ellis.

“Ironically, the person whose very big shoes I’m now filling was the first one who said, ‘You know, Evan, you ought to publish this’.” He was referring to SSI’s former Latin American Research Professor, Dr. Max Manwaring.

Ellis’s first major published work on China in Latin America was the 2005 monograph, **U.S. National Security Implications of Chinese Involvement in Latin America**,

governance or by corruption. In that mix, China basically challenges the U.S. at all levels.

published in 2005 by the Strategic Studies Institute.

“China’s economic interests basically threaten the alignment of the hemisphere in a way that is more cooperative and receptive than the U.S. [relations],” said Ellis. “In some countries, China’s vested interests in having countries that challenge U.S. equities, such as places like Venezuela, Bolivia, even former ALBA countries such as Ecuador and Argentina, have sustained those populist leftist regimes far beyond where they otherwise would have been reined in by economic and other realities.”

Since then, Ellis has traveled extensively throughout Latin American, following China’s activities. He taught one of the first courses on China/Latin America at the University of Miami, and completed his first book, *China in Latin America: The Whats &*

*Wherefores*, published in 2009 by Lynne Reinner Publishing.

To support his studies and relationships, he developed proficiency in the Spanish language, helped in part by his Colombian wife. “Being able to operate in the language ... is fundamental both in understanding what is happening and being able to have those conversations in confidence with the people in the region.”

As of 2009, working at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Ellis broadened his studies of the influence of non-hemispheric actors in Latin American countries. “Working with our Latin American counterparts on their security and defense issues, getting to know and understand those a lot better, while also continuing my scholarship about Chinese activities in Latin America, and activities by other actors including the Russians, Iranians and others,” he said.

“It was an opportunity for me to get to know DoD and working in support of DoD a lot better, and to get to know some of the core concerns and issues of our partner nations’ militaries in the region. When you work with people at the strategic level to try and design games and activities and education events around their core security needs, you get to know something about those security interests.

In 2014, Ellis replaced his mentor, Manwaring, at SSI, continuing his focus on non-U.S. influence in Latin America.

“Latin America is important to the U.S. and to its national security,” he said.

“Although we don’t widely recognize it, there is no other region in the world that is more directly linked to U.S. security and prosperity than Latin America – through commerce, investments, family ties and geographic links.

“When the region is prosperous that prosperity spills over to the United States. And, when things go bad in their region, whether it’s again gangs or drugs or terrorism, it directly impacts us more arguably than any other region,” said Ellis.

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