

Kremlin Centric and China Considerate:
Evo Morales, Bolivia, and Expressions of Alignment in a New Era of Great Power Competition

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Résumé.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Appendix (Figures).....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background.....	10
Literature Review.....	13
Methodology.....	22
Case Selection.....	22
Analysis.....	27
Hegemonic Preoccupations.....	29
Support of Russia’s “Territorial Defense” and Controversial Issues.....	39
Economic Advantages of Allyship with Russia.....	44
Additional Considerations.....	49
Discussion.....	56
Conclusion.....	64
Works Cited.....	67

Abstract

This work explores former Bolivian president Evo Morales' rhetorical alliance-building with Russia and China. Morales, in office from 2006 until 2019, has been an outspoken advocate for developing political, economic, and personal alliances with Russia. Following the Russian Federation's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many Latin American leaders have approached alliance with the country with condemnation or ambivalence, making Morales' substantial support unique among his cohort. In contrast, Morales has demonstrated uncharacteristic measurement in his approach toward alliance-building with China, even as China has exponentially increased trade, investment, and development projects throughout Latin America. While other Latin American leaders have enthusiastically embraced China's Latin American overtures, Morales has tempered his initial enthusiasm for Chinese endeavors and instead adopted an approach characterized by superficial pleasantries and omission of critical information. Using Morales' Twitter posts, interviews, and speeches to conduct discourse analysis, this work maintains that Morales is cognizant of the threat posed by nations with hegemonic ambitions and, resultingly, is keen to adopt a strategy of rhetorical hedging, allowing him maximum flexibility regarding the direction of the influence he exerts over Bolivia's alliance building. This work additionally posits that Morales sees benefits in allying with Russia that China is not able to match, including practical expertise in combatting Western hegemony, the potential for personal kickbacks, and development benefits.

Résumé

Cette étude explore les efforts employés par l'ancien président bolivien– Evo Morales– afin de construire des alliances rhétoriques avec la Russie et la Chine. Morales, président de Bolivie entre 2006 et 2019, est devenu un ardent défenseur du développement d'alliances politiques, économiques, et personnelles avec la Russie. À la suite de l'invasion de l'Ukraine par la Fédération de Russie en 2022, des nombreux dirigeants latino-américains ont abordé l'alliance avec ce pays avec un mélange de condamnation et d'ambivalence, ce qui rend le soutien prolifique de Morales unique parmi ses pairs. En revanche, Morales a fait preuve d'une mesure inhabituelle dans son approche de la construction d'une alliance avec la Chine, alors même que la Chine a augmenté de façon exponentielle le commerce, les investissements et les projets de développement dans toute l'Amérique latine. Alors que d'autres dirigeants latino-américains ont accueilli avec enthousiasme les ouvertures latino-américaines de la Chine, Morales a tempéré son enthousiasme initial pour les efforts chinois et a plutôt adopté une approche caractérisée par des plaisanteries superficielles et l'omission d'informations critiques. En utilisant les publications, interviews et discours de Morales sur Twitter afin de mener une analyse du discours, cet ouvrage soutient que Morales est conscient de la menace posée par les nations avec des ambitions hégémoniques et, par conséquent, est désireux d'adopter une stratégie de couverture rhétorique, lui permettant une flexibilité maximale quant à l'orientation de l'influence qu'il exerce sur la construction de l'alliance bolivienne. Ce travail postule en outre que Morales voit dans une alliance avec la Russie des avantages que la Chine n'est pas en mesure d'égaler, notamment une expertise pratique dans la lutte contre l'hégémonie occidentale, le potentiel de pots-de-vin personnels et des avantages en matière de développement.

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Appendix (Figures)

Statements of Support Offered to Russia and China on Controversial Issues

EVENT	COUNTRY	SUPPORT OFFERED BY MORALES = NO/YES	EVENT	COUNTRY	SUPPORT OFFERED BY MORALES = NO/YES
Human rights abuses of Uyghurs and/or Xinjiang	CHINA	NO	2014 Annexation of Crimea	RUSSIA	YES
Hong Kong Democracy	CHINA	NO	2022 invasion of Ukraine	RUSSIA	YES
Taiwan/One China Policy	CHINA	YES (One tweet addressing Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit)	Chemical weapon use in Syria	RUSSIA	YES
Nine-Dash Line/ South China Sea Territorial Dispute	CHINA	NO	Expulsion of Russian diplomats from European nations following the 2018 poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal	RUSSIA	YES

Figure 1: Statements of Support Offered to Russia and China on Controversial Issues

Introduction

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine has thrown the Russian Federation's territorial, economic, and political ambitions into the limelight, prompting scrutiny by scholars, the media, and governments. However, the discussion of Russian actions in its near abroad contrasts significantly with the Federation's comparatively obscure strategic relationship with Latin America. In part, this is due to the larger influence of the United States and China throughout the region. The United States has long functioned as a regional economic, political and cultural hegemon—an authority first engendered by the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, China has been gaining ground in Latin America through activities such as the Belt and Road Initiative, aid deals, and ever-increasing trade partnerships. China has become the region's largest trading partner¹ and has sought to establish increased influence via the development framework of 'South-South cooperation.'² Chinese efforts have been met with broad support from Latin American leaders. On a recent visit to China, for example, Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed over 20 bilateral agreements³ and emphasized China's ability to assist with "reindustrialization, help address poverty, and deliver benefits to the people."⁴ Argentina has taken a similar approach. In addition to signing numerous treaties and trade agreements, in one highly publicized incident, Argentine president Alberto Fernández remarkably provided his personal mobile number to the Chinese ambassador.⁵ On another

¹ "China Regional Snapshot: South America." n.d. Committee on Foreign Affairs (blog). Accessed July 14, 2023. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-south-america/>.

² Roy, Diana. 2023. "China's Growing Influence in Latin America | Council on Foreign Relations." Council Foreign Relations. June 15, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

³ Huges, Elenore, and Carla Bridi. 2023. "Brazil's Lula Visits China, Seeking Ties and Ukraine Support." AP News. April 12, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/brazil-china-lula-xi-trip-216ace0e80e6f0882571125c673f6964>.

⁴ "President Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Brazilian President Lula Da Silva." 2023. The Commissioner's Office of China's Foreign Ministry in the Hong Kong SAR. April 14, 2023. http://hk.ocmfa.gov.cn/eng/xjpzxzywshd/202304/t20230414_11059515.htm.

⁵ Gonzalez, Juan Luis. 2020. "Argentina's Ties with China Deepen under Fernández | Buenos Aires Times." Buenos Aires Times. August 22, 2020.

occasion, the Argentine government opted to sign a contract for a nuclear power station with China, edging out competitor Russia.⁶

For President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation, Latin America represents a frontier that warrants the development of economic, political, and social alliances. Under Putin, the Russian Federation has sought to re-introduce Cold War-era tactics that compete with China and the United States in influencing policies and economic interests in the region.⁷ To this end, Russia has expressed keen interest and exerted significant efforts to secure political and economic relationships with a number of Latin American countries through trade deals, aid offers, technological development ploys, and arms deals. However, in contrast to the enthusiastic displays with which leaders have welcomed Chinese initiatives, many Latin American states are reticent to align themselves with the Russian Federation. For instance, in discussions regarding Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva opposed the Russian narrative when he acknowledged Ukraine as the "great victim."⁸ Chilean president Gabriel Boric has condemned Russian actions as "an unacceptable war of imperial aggression."⁹ In Colombia, the government has expressed concern about Russian "activism" and, in 2020, expelled Russian diplomats over concerns of espionage.¹⁰ And across Latin America, Russia is

<https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/relaciones-carnales-argentinas-ties-with-china-deepen-under-fernandez.phtml>.

⁶ Secieru, Stanislav. 2021. "THE COMEBACK KID: Russia in Latin America." European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37734>.

⁷ Farah, Douglas, and Liana Eustacia Reyes. 2016. "Russia in Latin America: A Strategic Analysis." PRISM 5 (4): 102.

⁸ Stuenkel, Oliver. 2023. "Russia-Ukraine War: Why Brazil's Lula Is Eager to Negotiate, Not Taking Sides." Foreign Policy. May 18, 2023.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/18/russia-ukraine-war-brazil-lula-nonalignment-global-south/>.

⁹ Gamba, Laura. 2023. "Chilean President Urges Latin American Leaders to Condemn Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." AA. July 18, 2023.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/chilean-president-urges-latin-american-leaders-to-condemn-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/2949014>.

¹⁰ Secieru, Stanislav. 2021. "THE COMEBACK KID: Russia in Latin America." European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37734>.

declining in popularity. A 2017 poll conducted concluded that Russia was viewed negatively by 50 % of respondents in Brazil, 42 % in Mexico and 44% in Peru—an increase of 7%, 13% and 14% respectively compared to 2014.¹¹ In economic terms, even as the Russian government touts the significant increases in trade made since the early 2000s, the reality remains that Russia only represents a share of 0.7 % of the region’s economic exchanges, making it an unappealing partner for many states.¹²

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Bolivia date back over 120 years, but former president Evo Morales (2006 - 2019) was the first Bolivian leader to develop a working relationship that advanced Russian state interests in Bolivia. His strategic cooperation with Russia has resulted in a number of bilateral agreements focused on trade and Bolivia’s energy sector. Morales has also fostered cordial relations with President Putin; these ties have proven to be particularly fruitful in terms of investment and trade thanks to the leaders’ strong relationship. While most Latin American leaders adopt a tempered approach to Russia and favor more beneficial alliances with China, the rhetoric of former Bolivian President Evo Morales exemplifies the type of political relationship that Russia seeks to develop in Latin America. In 2019, for instance, Morales praised the Russian Federation for “protect[ing] international order, oppos[ing] use of force in international affairs and prevent[ing] interference into other nations’ internal affairs.”¹³ In contrast, Morales’ approach to China seems distinctly lackluster; his rhetoric is largely characterized by pleasantries and omission of key information. How Morales views, evaluates,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Bolivian President Visits Russia to Discuss Expanding Ties.” 2019. AP News. July 11, 2019. <https://apnews.com/general-news-792c7ab267254a26a598d0f374fe0630>.

and indicates alignment with two nations that represent a significant disparity of strength and popularity provide the foundational premise of this work.

This work will explore two key questions: In what ways do Morales' political, economic , and ideological considerations contribute to his apparent rhetorical preference for Russia? And how does Morales' preference for Russia coexist with his rhetoric addressing China?

By analyzing Evo Morales' social media presence, interviews, and speeches, this work proposes the following explanations. The first is that Morales' rhetoric reveals a process of threat assessment. Based on his commentary regarding interventionist actors and historical events, Morales' rhetoric reveals concern about how hegemony wield influence to accomplish their own objectives at the cost of smaller nations; particularly, he has sought to address how a return to a bipolar world (U.S.-China) would impact Bolivia. The second is that Russia's anti-West approach best fits Morales' own political strategy, and thus represents an appealing ally for both practical and ideological reasons. Morales has shown a willingness to support Russia through controversial events under the justification that Russia is acting in self-defense against an encroaching Western alliance. In contrast, China largely lacks Russia's contemporary experience in opposing the Western order, particularly with regard to military action. Ultimately, Morales supports the unique Russian experience in resisting the West on both an ideological and practical basis. Third, Russia is able to provide both Bolivia and Morales with benefits for his rhetorical alignment. Some of these benefits are more conventional (e.g. development deals) while others represent personal benefits incurred by Morales (e.g. job offers and election interference). Finally, Morales' rhetoric is revealing of hedging, indicating equivocal alignment with and

preference for Russia while continuing to use strategic omission and pleasantries in order to avoid alienating a rising China.

Background

Russia has worked to develop a strategy of engagement that maximizes the Federation's impact in Latin America at a relatively "low cost" via economic assistance, aid in avoiding the U.S.-dominated banking system, arms sales, visits from Russian officials, and economic investment.¹⁴ To gain alliances, Russia's outreach to Latin America typically follows a certain sequence: "first utilitarian economic contacts with a single state; then, further ones, with an increasing number of countries, motivated by geopolitical reasons and mutual-benefit agreements; and at the end the evolution of some of these contacts into solid political alliances."¹⁵ Such engagement is, in part, based on precepts of Russia's 2013 Gerasimov Doctrine, which espouses the repositioning of conventional warfare into an economic, psychological, and social arena.¹⁶ The Gerasimov Doctrine exemplifies how Russian influence has permeated Latin America, furthered by the popularity of Russian-backed Spanish-language media such as *RT Español* and *Sputnik Mundo*.¹⁷ The Russian government has lauded the expansion of these media sources; Russian president Vladimir Putin highlighted the necessity of the development of a diversity of information sources throughout the region: "[There are] severe communication wars [with] international actors intervening to establish the monopoly on the truth."¹⁸ Such statements highlight the Russian state's preference for offensive operations and

¹⁴ Farah, Douglas, and Kathryn Babineau. 2019. "Extra-Regional Actors in Latin America: The United States Is Not the Only Game in Town." *PRISM* 8 (1): 96–113.

¹⁵ Cadioli, Giovanni. 2012. "The Bear beyond the Ocean. Kremlin's Relations with Latin America as a Crucial Step for Russia Going Back to a Great Power Status." *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali* 79 (1 (313)): 49–67.

¹⁶ McKew, Molly. 2017. "The Gerasimov Doctrine - POLITICO Magazine." *Politico*. October 2017. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538/>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Noticias, Argentinas. 2014. "Vladimir Putin: 'La lucha de la Argentina es un ejemplo.'" *Noticias Argentinas*.

preemptive strikes in order to best “seize the initiative” and “preserve strategic parity.”¹⁹ A period of declining American influence in the region²⁰ allows Russia to implement its political and economic agenda in order to compete with the United States and China. Chief among Russia’s concerns is resisting the cultural, economic, and geographic influence exerted by the United States and the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Both Russia and Latin American nations, such as Bolivia, benefit from the Russian track record of resistance to American hegemony in the region. The Russian Federation profits from diplomatic relationships: “the Kremlin regards its renewed engagement in Latin America as a way to balance Russia’s asymmetric relationship with the US, if not in terms of capabilities, then at least in terms of the risks and threats each side has to face in their own neighborhoods.”²¹ For the Federation, Latin America is “another geographic theater where it can advance its vision of a multipolar world and keep in check what it perceives as U.S. global hegemonic instincts.”²² By demonstrating influence on an international stage—particularly beyond the realm of the former Soviet republics—Russia hopes to show that, similarly to rising superpower China, it too can exert political, economic, and military outreach beyond its immediate region.²³

While the United States, which enjoys a long-standing relationship with Latin America, has historically maintained the upper hand in the region, China is increasingly engaging in economic

October 9, 2014.

<https://noticiasargentinas.com/politica/vladimir-putin-la-lucha-la-argentina-es-un-ejemplo-n27128>.

¹⁹ Godement, Mathieu Duchâtel, François. 2016. “China and Russia: Gaming the West.” ECFR. November 2, 2016. https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_and_russia_gaming_the_west7166/.

²⁰ Hakim, Peter. 2006. “Is Washington Losing Latin America?” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (1): 39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031841>.

²¹ Secieru, Stanislav. 2021. “THE COMEBACK KID: Russia in Latin America.” European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37734>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

and development initiatives that challenge the United States' role as a regional hegemon. Latin American nations that are major food and mineral producers especially "look to China as an economic and political alternative to U.S. hegemony."²⁴ Latin American states increasingly seek to develop alliances with nations that provide an alternative to "less than fully fair and balanced"²⁵ economic agreements offered by the United States. Donald Trump's sudden withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, for instance, left nations such as Chile, Mexico, and Peru concerned about the sustainability of the agreement and American support, providing an opening for increased alignment with China.

China, a rising power, is acting upon the same principles which governed the United States' ascent to global superpower status, with the potential for "competition and conflict."²⁶ Latin American countries recognize the advantages that allyship with China can provide. Between 2000 and 2020, for instance, China-Latin American trade exploded 26-fold from \$12 billion to \$315 billion.²⁷ If growth continues on the predicted trajectory, China-Latin American trade will top \$700 billion by 2035,²⁸ edging out the United States. In Brazil, for instance, China replaced the United States as the nation's largest trading partner in 2009.²⁹ Consequently, Brazil has received over \$55 billion of Chinese investments in the last decade, directed into 145 projects,

²⁴ Hakim, Peter. 2006. "Is Washington Losing Latin America?" *Foreign Affairs* 85 (1): 39.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20031841>.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp 49.

²⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. 2021. "The Inevitable Rivalry." *Foreign Affairs*, October 19, 2021.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-10-19/inevitable-rivalry-cold-war>.

²⁷ Zhang, Pepe, and Tatiana Lacerda Prazeres. 2021. "China's Trade with Latin America Is Bound to Keep Growing. Here's Why That Matters." *World Economic Forum*. June 17, 2021.
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/china-trade-latin-america-caribbean/>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Moore, Malcolm. 2009. "China Overtakes the US as Brazil's Largest Trading Partner." *The Telegraph*. May 9, 2009.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/5296515/China-overtakes-the-US-as-Brazils-largest-trading-partner.html>.

and has received loans from China in excess of \$28 billion.³⁰ Most representative of increased Chinese influence in the region is the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through BRI commitments with seven Latin American nations—including Bolivia— China has provided \$141 billion in loans to participating initiatives since 2005, an amount totalling more than the loans from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the CAF Development Bank of Latin America combined.³¹ Evidently, allyship with China can provide critical benefits to Latin American nations— even as Russia seeks to exert its dominance throughout the region.

Literature Review

This work examines Evo Morales’ approach to alliance formation with Russia and China; a review of the literature focused on alliance formation may elucidate the considerations behind the Bolivian leader’s rhetorical choices. According to Walt, alliance formation is based upon a function of threat assessment, rather than mere distribution of power. Walt highlights how elements of geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intention contribute to the perceived threat of rising powers. As a result, states will seek to align themselves with or against the states that pose the greatest threat. Walt summarizes that “to ally with the dominant power means placing one’s trust in its continued benevolence.”³² Smaller nations such as Bolivia may accordingly opt for alliances opposing the dominant power in an effort to preserve their independence and security. Such alignment comes with an added benefit: “Joining the weaker side increases the new member’s influence within the alliance because the weaker side has a

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “China-Latin America Finance Database 2019 | Global Development Policy Center.” 2019. Global Development Policy Center. 2019. <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2019/02/21/china-latin-america-finance-database-2019/>.

³² Walt, Stephen M. 1987. “Explaining Alliance Formation.” In *The Origins of Alliances*, 17–49. Cornell University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt32b5fc>.

greater need for assistance.”³³ While Bolivia likely does not represent a particularly meaningful or potent partner for China, the opposite may be true for Russia, particularly at a juncture when the benefits for Russia from each additional ally increase exponentially, given Russia’s relative isolation following global condemnation for its invasion of Ukraine. The benefits of such an allyship may also prove uncommonly profitable to Bolivia given Russia’s keen interest in exerting its status as an influential player on the global stage. As a result, Russia may be willing to provide political and economic support to Bolivia and Bolivian leaders in a way that China is unwilling to consider.

Walt emphasizes the ideas of balancing and bandwagoning in traditional theories of alliance formations; balancing entails the formation of alliances against a prevailing threat, with the goal of preventing a dominant power from asserting control, while bandwagoning focuses on alignment with nations that are a threat—either as a form of appeasement or in order to profit from the dominant nation’s rise to power. Nations that are weaker than the state that constitutes the threat may adopt a bandwagon approach. However, Morales’ approach toward allyship with China, in particular, does not fit neatly into the balancing/bandwagoning framework. Instead, Morales’ rhetoric is indicative of hedging—the practice of engagement simultaneously coupled with strategic hesitation in order to minimize risks to sovereignty, security, and the economy. Some literature has explored how small nations engage in hedging, particularly in South East Asia. Chung, for instance, examines how states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have endeavored to maintain a delicate balance between the United States and China by engaging economically with China while simultaneously maintaining military ties with the

³³ Ibid. pp. 4.

United States.³⁴ Per Chung, maintaining sovereignty is paramount for nations who are engaging in hedging behaviors: “It would be unpalatable for ASEAN countries to consider bandwagoning...given their sensitivity...as mostly post-colonial creations over the preservation of their sovereign independence and autonomy in foreign policy orientation.”³⁵ Moreover, small states must be cognizant of how their alliances are perceived by other powers given that “bandwagoning with a rising China might be construed by an established power...as an unfriendly move by ASEAN to limit or exclude its influence.”³⁶ Thus, for Morales, hedging is an option that allows Bolivia to maintain its sovereignty, a point that the Bolivian leader has repeatedly emphasized as being of paramount importance to the nation’s foreign policy priorities. Additionally, hedging allows Morales to continue to develop an alliance strategy with Russia rather than risking isolation from either Russia or China should the alliance between the two nations sour. Bolton notes in “Russia and China: An Approaching Conflict?” that while Russia and China contemporarily enjoy a shared geopolitical agenda and a close alliance, the historical relationship between the two nations has also been colored by rivalry. From a foundation of 1950s-era Sino-Soviet split and border clashes over the status of Outer Mongolia, both nations are unlikely to be complacent towards each other’s expansionism and, consequently, territorial and resource disputes can mark a frontier for future conflict.³⁷

As it stands, relatively few scholarly articles address Latin American nations’ use of hedging as a strategy for navigating alliances with great powers. Kalout and de Sá Guimarães’ article

³⁴ Chung, Chien-peng (C.P.). 2004. “SOUTHEAST ASIA–CHINA RELATIONS: Dialectics of ‘Hedging’ and ‘Counter-Hedging.’” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35–53.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Bolton, K. R. 2009. “Russia and China An Approaching Conflict?” *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 34 (2): 154–94.

“Hedging Between the U.S. and China: Brazil Protecting Itself to Survive” explores how Brazil should approach a growing Sino-American rivalry. The recommendations posed by the authors are mirrored in Morales’ approach of rhetorical hedging; Brazil should manage the “growing global rivalry with pendulum movements: simultaneous balancing actions (balancing against the leader–pro-China efforts) and bandwagoning (following the leader–pro-U.S. efforts) ...with the dual objective of protecting itself against the potential adverse effects of said rivalry and building a beneficial multipolar order.”³⁸ While Brazil is in a different alliance-building position than Bolivia (e.g. a member of BRICS and a regional economic and political leader), Morales similarly opts to approach his support for Russia in a way that would be considered non-threatening to Chinese interests yet allows for alliances that best support Bolivia’s economic and political interests. In contrast, balancing may risk completely eschewing an alliance with China while bandwagoning with China may imply a loss of sovereignty. Incorporating Russia and Bolivia into the discussion of hedging in Latin America allows for an enhanced understanding of how smaller nations approach alliance building with nations seeking to develop a network of states friendly to their respective policies and ambitions.

Turner contends in “Russia, China, and a Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined” that Russia and China are both vocal proponents of redefining the contemporary world order—seeking to move from a unipolar system dominated by the U.S. to a multipolar approach. A shared facet of the Russian and Chinese approach is an emphasis on exclusion; both nations have oriented their alliance-building vis-a-vis the idea of historical exclusion by the U.S.-dominated

³⁸ Kalout, Hussein, and Feliciano de Sá Guimarães. n.d. “Hedging Between the U.S. and China: Brazil Protecting Itself to Survive.” CEBRI Revista. Accessed December 14, 2023. <https://cebri.org/revista/en/artigo/57/hedging-between-the-us-and-china-brazil-protecting-itself-to-survive>.

structure.³⁹ However, China's significant inroads throughout Latin America are primarily a result of massive infrastructure investments while Russia opts instead to engage with ideologically-aligned states—suggesting a deliberate targeting that may be appealing to nations that have been historically overlooked by larger powers. Farah and Yates contend that, in contrast to China's "easy entry" to Latin America courtesy of its "massive resources and limited conditions for loans and aid," Russia's "vested interest" in ideologically-aligned nations is due to its comparatively limited resources.⁴⁰ However, smaller states' responses to Russian and Chinese overtures may be indicative of how an approach centered on ideology may serve as a counterweight to massive Chinese economic influence.

Bugayova explores how Russia's use of bilateral alliances to create a supportive state-to-state network permits the development of a foreign policy environment conducive to the Kremlin's goal of developing a multipolar system.⁴¹ This perspective counters the view that smaller nations may evaluate alliance decisions in a multilateral context. In "All Alliances Are Multilateral: Rethinking Alliance Formation," for instance, Fordham and Poast challenge the bilateral approach of understanding alliance formation and instead argue that leaders will assess each alliance as a whole entity rather than specific potential partners.⁴² Bugayova's assertion that bilateral alliances are a key component in creating an international system favorable to Russian interests is an important consideration when addressing how Morales perceives potential

³⁹ Turner, Susan. 2009. "Russia, China and a Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined." *Asian Perspective* 33 (1): 159–84.

⁴⁰ Farah, Douglas, and Caitlyn Yates. 2020. "Great Power Competition in Latin America: A New Normal." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 44 (2): 45–64.

⁴¹ Bugayova, Nataliya. 2020. "PUTIN'S OFFSET: THE KREMLIN'S GEOPOLITICAL ADAPTATIONS SINCE 2014." Institute for the Study of War. September 2020. <http://dev-isw.bivings.com/>.

⁴² Fordham, Benjamin, and Paul Poast. 2016. "All Alliances Are Multilateral: Rethinking Alliance Formation." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60 (5): 840–65.

alliances. Morales has historically been reticent of multilateral allyship with other great powers, most particularly ones which involve the United States.

How small states approach alignment decisions while maintaining their autonomy is a key theme of this work. Keohane addresses the challenges faced by small nations in the “Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics.” He critiques a supposed overemphasis on “nonalignment” and proposes that, for many small powers “alliances have increasingly become instruments designed to achieve nonmilitary goals.”⁴³ This is on par with many of the considerations evident in Morales’ thought processes. With comparatively limited economic and political prowess, Bolivia is likely to seek alignment with states that permit for a “shoring up” of projects most beneficial to Bolivia’s long-term outcomes; the choices of small nations are not merely based on military considerations but also on political and strategic ones. However, smaller nations are also able to leverage their influence in order to impact alliance building with larger states. Keohane’s subsequent 1971 work “The Big Influence of Small Allies” challenges the conventional belief that smaller nations have a limited ability to exert influence and explores small states’ development of close working relationships with specific government sub-units or special interest groups to exert influence.⁴⁴ While Keohane’s work is focused on small nations’ engagement with the United States, Bolivia’s contemporary relationship with the Russian Federation can be viewed through a similar lens. With Morales as a mouthpiece, Bolivia has sought to leverage its relationships with commercial entities to draw closer alliances with the Federation. Particularly in the case of increased lithium development and mining, both Russian

⁴³ Keohane, Robert O. 1969. “Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics.” Edited by George Liska, Robert E. Osgood, Robert L. Rothstein, and David Vital. *International Organization* 23 (2): 291–310.

⁴⁴ Keohane, Robert O. 1971. “The Big Influence of Small Allies.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 2: 161–82.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1147864>.

and Chinese organizations—many state-affiliated—are eager to elicit continued support for their presence in Bolivia from government entities. For Morales specifically, the Bolivian leader has seen his rhetorical support of Russia materialize into job offers and political support, indicating that he may be aiming his rhetoric to appeal to state-affiliated sub-units (such as Rostom, RT, and Gazprom) which will provide him with both political and material support. Ultimately, Bolivia and Morales are able to effectively maneuver these leverage points in order to ensure that an alliance is most beneficial to the Plurinational state.

Additional considerations may factor into Morales' approach to rhetorical alliance building. For instance, in the article "Reliability, Reputation, and Alliance Formation" by Crescenzi et. al., the authors explore how great powers' behaviors in past alliances can influence the decision-making process for states interested in developing new allies. They summarize that "any alliance in which a partner fails (or is expected to fail) to live up to its commitments is largely devoid of merit."⁴⁵ Consequently, states which have gained a reputation as upholding their existing commitments are perceived as more dependable. China's increasing reputation as an ally which isn't hesitant in exerting its authority—sometimes to the detriment of smaller nations— may imply that alignment with Russia appears to be a more reliable and safe choice for Morales. For instance, highlighting the benefits garnered from a partnership with Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin recently wrote off 90% of debts—totaling \$23 billion—to African countries.⁴⁶ Morales may view actions such as these as reliable indicators of Russia's commitment to treating its partners equitably.

⁴⁵ Crescenzi, Mark J.C., Jacob D. Kathman, Katja B. Kleinberg, and Reed M. Wood. 2012. "Reliability, Reputation, and Alliance Formation." *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (2): 259–74.

⁴⁶ TASS. 2019. "Moscow Forgave More than \$20 Bln of Africa's Debt to Russia, Says Putin." TASS. October 23, 2019.

https://tass.com/politics/1084724?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

Even as reputation and reliability are important considerations for leaders formulating their approach to alliances, anti-Americanism writ large can be an additional factor. In “The World’s Resentment: Anti-Americanism as a Global Phenomenon,” Rodman highlights how American hegemony has resulted in increased efforts to build counterweights. To this end, Rodman emphasizes how smaller nations have sought to strengthen their alliances with regional powers or join multilateral institutions in order to enhance their autonomy and reduce their dependence on an American-led system.⁴⁷ For Morales, however, seeking an alternative from an American-dominated system may not imply immediate alliance with another rising hegemon. Instead, forming a close alliance with Russia represents hedging against the possibility of domination by a rising global power—China—while allowing for continued autonomy, political benefits, and economic investments.

However, the way that states factor some considerations— particularly ideology— into alliance-building is not always a straightforward process. Contesting Hans Morgenthau’s notion of “ideological solidarity,” which refers to alliances likely to result from states sharing political or cultural traits, Walt contends that “the impact of ideology on the choice of alliance partners [is] exaggerated.”⁴⁸ Therefore, a shared desire for a global system free from American-domination may not be a sufficient motivator in Morales’ reasoning behind his preferences. Instead, he may factor in additional material or security considerations. This is on par with the hypotheses posed in this work; should Morales evaluate preferential alliance on this ideological basis alone, China may be an easy choice. However, Walt offers an additional

⁴⁷ Rodman, Peter W. 2000. “The World’s Resentment: Anti-Americanism as a Global Phenomenon.” *The National Interest*, no. 60: 33–41.

⁴⁸ Walt, Stephen M. 1987. “Explaining Alliance Formation.” In *The Origins of Alliances*, 17–49. Cornell University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt32b5fc>.

consideration in discussion of ideology: “The more centralized and hierarchical the movement prescribed by the ideology, the more conflictive and fragile any resulting alliance will be.”⁴⁹ China’s centralized and hierarchical Communist political system may be an unappealing choice if Morales is looking for some degree of flexibility. Walt highlights the particular “virulence” of alliances between Communist states and, referencing Cold War-era alliances, emphasizes that “the cohesion of the Communist International lasted only as long as foreign Communist parties were dependent on Moscow’s support.”⁵⁰ For Morales, a post-Communist Russia may prove to be a more flexible and durable ally than a China that is strictly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. To grapple with these concerns, Bolivia became one of the founding members of the Puebla Group, an academic and political forum dedicated to a position of “active non-alignment—” a position that espouses an objective encompassing a full spectrum of foreign policy, ideological, and military dimensions. Central to the core tenants of the Puebla Group is the principle of sovereignty in alliance-building; Fortin, et. al highlight that in its 2019 founding manifesto, the group’s members endorse the concept of supposed “active non-alignment in Latin America.” In other words, Latin American states recognize the necessity of “putting the interests of our peoples first and ensuring uncompromising respect for our sovereignty”⁵¹ to permit for alignment decisions that encompass an opportunistic evaluation of the benefits offered by major powers.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Carlos Fortin, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami. 2023. “Latin American Foreign Policies in the New World Order.” Anthem Press. February 2023.
<https://anthempres.com/politics-and-international-relations/latin-american-foreign-policies-in-the-new-world-order-epub>.

Methodology

Case Selection

Geographically, Bolivia shares borders with larger Latin American powers, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Bolivia is also one of the two landlocked nations in South America. These factors imply that the development needs and expectations of Bolivia differ significantly from those of its neighbors. As landlocked nations typically lag significantly behind in development due to the expense of importing and exporting goods and developing sustainable trading routes, countries that offer development deals and trade opportunities may prove to be particularly appealing as allies. Even as Bolivia remains isolated in some respects, the nation also has great mineral wealth. From Spain's exploitation of tin and silver to bids by global corporations to extract lithium, larger nations have a demonstrated interest in Bolivia's resources. Lithium has proven to be a particularly high-value commodity; it is an essential component of lithium-ion batteries used to power electric vehicles and rechargeable batteries for other electronic devices and is becoming increasingly important as nations take steps to combat the climate crisis. Currently, Chinese companies manage two-thirds of the global lithium refining process and, in early 2023, the Bolivian government signed a \$1 billion agreement with the Chinese firms CATL, BRUNO, and CMOC (CBC) to develop lithium extraction processes.⁵² In sum, Bolivia's location, development needs, and mineral wealth represent a particularly interesting case study in an examination of alliance formation.

Morales' rhetoric reveals how a Latin American leader perceives and indicates alliance building with nations such as Russia and China. As Latin America's longest-serving president prior to his

⁵² Joseph Bouchard. 2023. "In Bolivia, China Signs Deal For World's Largest Lithium Reserves." *The Diplomat*. February 10, 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/in-bolivia-china-signs-deal-for-worlds-largest-lithium-reserves/>.

2019 ouster, Evo Morales has long positioned himself as an authoritative representative for the Bolivian people and their interests through his role as a persuasive figurehead. Morales' rhetoric also enjoys significant reach. Morales has garnered legitimacy as Bolivia's first indigenous president and serves as a representative of a uniquely anti-colonial approach. He has emphasized the necessity of developing a natural culture based upon the ideals of plurinationality, sovereignty, and dignity—an approach that likely fostered the party's appeal to the sectors of the population disillusioned with previous iterations of the Bolivian government and their cooperation with Western nations and institutions. Morales' opinions frequently find a supportive audience, many of whom cite his significant results in improving the Bolivian economy and standards of living, establishing a strong foundation for his claims regarding the importance of Bolivian allyship with the Russian Federation. His fervently allied voters (up to 70% of the population expressed approval of his presidency) imply that Morales' points remain ingrained in the political consciousness of many Bolivian and Latin American voters. Particularly given that Bolivia is currently governed by Luis Arce, who represents the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), the dominant party founded by Morales, the former leader's words may have increased weight within the decision-making apparatuses of the current administration as Arce looks to his popular and influential predecessor for political guidance. Finally, Morales remains involved in Bolivian politics, meaning that he will have another opportunity to implement his political vision. In September 2023, for instance, Evo Morales announced his candidacy for the 2025 presidential elections. Should he be elected, he may serve as the nation's leader for at least five years, implying a practical continuation of Morales' current rhetorical approaches toward alliance-building.

This work uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological lens to explore the ways in which powerful gatekeepers in society influence social beliefs and values, and shape ideologies. The examination of rhetoric suggests how the ‘use of language can produce the effects of authority, legitimacy, consensus and so forth that are recognized as being intrinsic to politics.’⁵³ Thus, CDA is an ideal lens through which to draw meaningful conclusions about Morales’ employment of rhetorical strategies in alliance building with Russia and China. Furthermore, rhetoric serves as a legitimation technique and one with the potential for appreciable outcomes; “legitimation strategies are more than cheap talk; they have structural effects—once used, they have causal effects not reducible to interests. Indeed, under some conditions, legitimation strategies can have a lock-in effect, one that ultimately constraints actors from pursuing their interests.”⁵⁴ Such a note is important; the statements that Morales makes have the potential for consequences for not only his nation but also for the states with which he engages.

This study will draw upon several types of sources. First, Evo Morales’ social media posts and interviews. Most specifically, Morales has been exceptionally vocal about Russia on Twitter, where the former Bolivian leader boasts over one million followers. Morales’ dispatches on Twitter serve as an expedient and effective means to evaluate his rhetoric given that posts are both widely accessible and allow for concise, real-time exchanges. Given that 80% of active

⁵³ Chilton, Paul. 2004. *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE: Routledge.

⁵⁴ Stacie E. Goddard. 2009. *Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy: Jerusalem and Northern Ireland*. Cambridge University Press.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/indivisible-territory-and-the-politics-of-legitimacy/2501DED02D982E22C3E36AFF89A40CA>.

Twitter users use a mobile device and there are 12 million cellular phone subscriptions registered in Bolivia (out of a population of 12.8 million),⁵⁵ using Morales' tweets as material from which to base analysis will provide a base which also likely informs the political perspectives and knowledge of a broad swath of the Bolivian population. Consequently, this work will draw from a number of Evo Morales' Twitter posts dating from 2016 to 2023.

Morales does not specify the use of a media team in the publication of tweets from his personal Twitter account (@evoespueblo). It can be reasonably assumed that the tweets published through this account are an accurate representation of Morales' opinions and remain relatively unfiltered by media teams that may sanitize the content of missives. In contrast, the official Twitter account for the Ministerio de la Presidencia (@MinPresidencia), primarily provides its audience with publicity photos and short, neutral captions. Morales' tweets have been selected using a keyword filter via Twitter's public user interface (e.g. example keyword [from:evoespueblo]) from a total data set of 20,800 total tweets. The time frame for analysis is from April 2016 (when Morales joined Twitter) to October 2023. Keywords were searched in English and Spanish and include general terms such as "Bolivia;" "Russia;" "China;" "development;" "economy;" and "diplomacy" as well as specific phrases such as "Morales visit to Moscow." The text of tweets emerging from advanced keyword searches of terms such as "Russia" and "China" was manually scraped in order to provide some supportive quantitative analysis. This allows the inclusion of statistics emphasizing the frequency with which Morales cites key terms or events. This approach allows for linguistic patterns (such as word frequency or consistent phrasing) to be

⁵⁵ "Mobile Cellular Subscriptions in Bolivia 2021." 2023. Statista. March 31, 2023.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/186103/number-of-mobile-cellular-subscriptions-in-bolivia/>.

converted into data points that permit for a “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications.”⁵⁶ These statistics will be complementary to the qualitative nature of discourse analysis.

Second, some additional analysis is based on speeches made by former Bolivian president Evo Morales throughout his tenure as president of the Plurinational State (2006-2019). These speeches include some description of Russia or China and/or include mention of relevant economic, social, and diplomatic engagement indicative of Morales’ views and approach. These speeches were gathered from official transcripts, reputable news outlets, academic publications, or reputable digital archives.

Third, in order to provide support for the conclusions drawn by the subjective analysis of Morales’ remarks, this work will also draw upon secondary data to substantiate Morales’ Twitter discourses and his public speeches. These sources will include statements prepared for press conferences and memos published by the Bolivian Ministry of Communication as well as sources from the Russian Foreign Ministry. Additional sources specifying details of particular events as well as outcomes of policy-making, such as accounts and analysis in media and research works, allows for more objective conclusions to be drawn regarding the interpretation of Morales’ rhetoric.

In order to explore the data described above, this discourse analysis will principally address the following elements of Morales’ rhetoric. First, how Morales frames issues and events is key to

⁵⁶ Sebastián Sayago. 2014. “The Construction of Qualitative and Quantitative Data Using Discourse Analysis as a Research Technique.” *Quality & Quantity* 49 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-014-0020-0>.

understanding the Bolivian leader's process of alliance formation. The idea of framing focuses on how Morales presents information and narratives in order to influence the audience's perception regarding current events or policies. Examining how Morales communicates his perspective on international threats and opportunities reveals the considerations that are used to justify his alignment with Russia while permitting hedging against China. Secondly, Morales' rhetorical descriptions of the relationship between powers permits examination of how his language reflects, challenges, or reinforces the dynamics between Bolivia, Russia, and China. Morales' frequent appeals to sovereignty as well as any indicators of negotiation (e.g. building rapport, highlighting benefits, contending with conflict, extending support, and centering needs) are of particular interest. Third, the emotional aspects of Morales' rhetoric will be revealing of both his concerns and beliefs as well as his objectives in alliance-formation. Expressions of pride, anger, and worry can be indicative of Morales' commitment to addressing certain issues or alliances. Finally, omissions within the source material will also provide a valuable aspect of analysis. It will be necessary to infer how Morales establishes alignment via fallacies of omission or ambiguity.

Analysis

Morales views engaging in pro-Russian rhetoric as an endeavor that could result in favorable geopolitical outcomes for Bolivia. Ergo, Russia represents an actor who can be placed as a counter to China—especially as the nation has sought to increase their regional influence through economic and political activities.⁵⁷ Given a history of accusations that China engages in debt-trap diplomacy against nations who supposedly benefit from the economic investment

⁵⁷ “Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity - United States Department of State.” n.d. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/americas-partnership-for-economic-prosperity/>.

sponsored by the BRI, Morales may view allyship with China as a proposition that could result in long-term negative implications for Bolivia.⁵⁸ While the deals offered by China have the potential to result in significant economic growth for participating nations, China's reputation may spark concern about economic and political drawbacks, resulting in Morales' unwillingness to completely bandwagon with China and dictate a preference for Russia instead.

This chapter will discuss the following sub-points. First, Morales' rhetoric regarding rising and great powers can be classified as a type of threat assessment. He emphasizes how major powers have caused economic exploitation, regime change, invasions, and unequal economic models that have been detrimental to small nations. Based on analysis of Morales' perception of the historical and contemporary threats posed by great powers, it is possible to ascertain that Morales is concerned about how hegemons, including China, interact with and influence LATAM nations. Second, Morales perceives Russia as a viable economic and political ally, despite the global reputational damage it has suffered since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In order to promote this alignment, Morales spotlights Russia as an ally that does not pose a threat to the sovereignty of LATAM nations. Morales instead frames Russian controversial actions (e.g. the invasion of Ukraine) as responses that have been elicited by the provocative actions of the United States and NATO. As a result, Russia offers Bolivia an ally experienced in the practical aspects of combating encroaching Western hegemony. Third, Morales sees benefits in alignment with Russia. These benefits extend beyond using Russia as a strategic player in the alignment systems of LATAM states and can impart economic and development outcomes. By highlighting these

⁵⁸ Rajah, Roland, Alexandre Dayant, and Jonathan Pryke. 2019. "Ocean of Debt? Belt and Road and Debt Diplomacy in the Pacific." Report. Lowy Institute for International Policy. China, Pacific Area. <https://apo.org.au/node/264261>.

factors, Morales can position Russia as an attractive option for alignment even as China remains Latin America's most viable economic alternative to the United States.

Hegemonic Preoccupations

Throughout his tenure as Bolivia's president and as a preeminent leftist leader, Evo Morales has been particularly vocal about the interference of hegemonic nations in Latin America. In an effort to prevent the spread of Soviet ideology via a domino effect during the Cold War, for instance, the United States backed Operation Condor, a clandestine network of terror that encompassed four-fifths of South America. For left-leaning nations, the implications of American involvement were profound, with the U.S. supporting a coup against democratically-elected socialist president Salvador Allende in Chile and waging over 600 assassination attempts against Cuban communist leader Fidel Castro.⁵⁹ For Morales, it is obvious that concerns about hegemonic interference loom large as he decides where to direct his rhetorical allyship.

Morales' rhetoric addressing the current regional hegemon—the United States—establishes his approach to great powers. Using rhetoric that emphasizes the threat posed to Latin American governments, he highlights how the involvement of the United States has been detrimental to independent nations' resources and political systems:

“[The US] accused popularly-elected governments of being ‘communists,’ and in order to plunder natural resources, they accused socialist presidents of being ‘terrorists.’”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Noguee, Joseph L., and John W. Sloan. 1979. “Allende's Chile and the Soviet Union: A Policy Lesson for Latin American Nations Seeking Autonomy.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21 (3): 339–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165728>.

⁶⁰ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2022. “Esta operación política sigue la misma ‘receta’ que EE.UU usa para justificar golpes e invadir países. Para ejecutar el Plan Cóndor, acusaban a gobiernos populares de ser ‘comunistas’, para saquear los recursos naturales, señalaban a presidentes socialistas de ser ‘terroristas’.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1492467396807835652>.

One of the primary rhetorical techniques employed by Morales to place emphasis on the threat posed by the United States is to highlight how left-leaning governments were designated as ideological adversaries to a unipolar world order. Such framing serves to demonstrate how Morales views the United States: a hegemon that exerts influence over public perspectives and delegitimizes “popularly” elected governments in order to achieve a geopolitical strategy. Likewise, Morales’ statement highlights his impression of how the United States appropriated the designations of “communists” and “terrorists” to foster the legitimization of covert actions. Such framing serves two purposes. First, it highlights how hegemons dictate the international system. Great powers are able to disregard democratic elections and reshape the global narrative at their convenience. Morales repurposes the designations of “terrorists”⁶¹ in order to highlight popularly-elected actors who could be vulnerable to the tendencies of great powers to revise narratives. Second, by claiming that actors during this time were interested in “plunder[ing] natural resources,” Morales openly positions rising global hegemons as interventionist actors with ulterior motives for its geopolitical agenda in the region. Bolivia, with one of the largest reserves of lithium in the world, is certainly vulnerable to economic exploitation, particularly as lithium has become increasingly valuable in green energy initiatives. Concerns regarding economic exploitation have recently materialized with the current Bolivian government’s signing of a \$1 billion agreement with Chinese firms known collectively as CBC (CATL, BRUNP, and CMOC) in order to jumpstart the export of lithium. This agreement comes even as Bolivian opposition has claimed that the deal violates Bolivian laws stating that no foreign firm may be

⁶¹ Morales has repeatedly designated himself as a “terrorist.” In a 2010 speech given at the IX Conferencia de Ministros de Defensa de las Américas, Morales—a former coca farmer—humorously positioned himself as an “Andean Bin-Laden,” as he claimed that the United States used unfounded pretexts such as narcotrafficking and terrorism to intervene in Latin American affairs.

involved with extraction of the resource, only production, due to concerns of exploitation by foreign powers.⁶²

Morales' emphasis on the detrimental impacts of interventionist actions taken by great powers has only increased since the Russian Federation's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Morales equates the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO/OTAN) with the United States, its most preeminent member. Highlighting the danger posed to resources and sovereignty, Morales contends that the continued eastern shift of NATO constitutes an interventionist threat to sovereign actors. In February of 2022, shortly following the invasion of Ukraine, Morales tweeted the following:

*"Someday, #NATO will be prosecuted for constituting a threat to international peace and security, for promoting invasions and wars with the U.S. that result in thousands of deaths, for plundering countries' resources and defending the interests of the capitalist system that concentrates wealth in the hands of the elites."*⁶³

Reminiscent of Morales' Tweet about the U.S. referring to left-leaning governments as terrorists or communists, this statement demonstrates how Morales evaluates the threat posed by entities that supposedly counter international peace and security. He highlights the human costs of interventionism. He emphasizes the economic exploitation that is likely to result from such events. Finally, he stresses the reversion of equality by addressing the concentration of wealth by elites. By emphasizing the personal effects resultant of interventionism, Morales creates a stark comparison between small nations and major actors with expansionist aims.

⁶² Joseph Bouchard. 2023. "In Bolivia, China Signs Deal For World's Largest Lithium Reserves." The Diplomat. February 10, 2023.

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/in-bolivia-china-signs-deal-for-worlds-largest-lithium-reserves/>.

⁶³ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2022. "En algún momento, la #OTAN será procesada por ser amenaza para la paz y seguridad internacional, por promover con EE.UU invasiones y guerras con miles de muertos, por saquear recursos de países y defender intereses del sistema capitalista que concentra la riqueza en pocas manos." Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1498049093515419648>.

Morales has demonstrated the shrewd ability to recognize and evaluate threats that may be impactful to his nation and agenda. Morales has long considered the United States as a threat and has unequivocally rejected any efforts at alliance. While his approach to the region's historical hegemon has been unequivocally negative, Morales' approach to China is characterized by strategic omission and hedging, even as China continues to gain power and exert influence on the continent. Since 2018, Bolivia has been a part of the BRI, joining countries such as Peru and Venezuela in the LATAM region. Initially, Morales offered some pleasantries regarding Chinese involvement in Bolivia:

*"I want to highlight the impetus and the spirit of global cooperation that China projects through its Belt and Road Initiative, which will help to lift millions of people out of poverty in the participating countries."*⁶⁴

Using coalition-building rhetoric, Morales highlights Chinese initiative. This statement establishes common ground (development of global cooperation and Chinese projects) with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping. Morales delivers a clear statement of power maximization—the implication of the above message is that, as a participating nation in the BRI, Bolivia will benefit from Chinese investment with quantifiable results. Such a statement can assist in predetermination; by using deterministic verbs such as “will,” Morales wants to encourage continued “impetus” and “cooperation.”

Additional examination, reveals that Morales' initial approach has given way to strategic omission and platitudes. In a 2021 speech given at the World Political Parties Summit, for

⁶⁴ “Evo Morales Speech on Multipolarity and Bolivia-China Cooperation - Friends of Socialist China.” 2021. Friends of Socialist China. July 11, 2021. <https://socialistchina.org/2021/07/11/evo-morales-speech-on-multipolarity-and-bolivia-china-cooperation/>.

example, Morales highlights the accomplishments of his own party—rather than what a Chinese-Bolivian alliance has jointly accomplished.

*“The Movement to Socialism...has demonstrated that it can govern with honesty, dignity and sovereignty. Our democratic cultural revolution has brought about a social, political and economic transformation without precedent in the history of Bolivia. We have nationalized our natural resources. We have recovered the strategic companies for the benefit of the people. As a result, we have been able to reduce extreme poverty from 38.2 percent to 15.2 percent.”*⁶⁵

Using the word “we” in order to anaphorically position himself as both the leader of MAS and a “democratic cultural revolution,” Morales establishes himself as an authority who has independently facilitated the positive changes made in Bolivia. Furthermore, Morales’ strategic use of the word “democratic” implies a certain intent. Without a reference to a “cultural revolution,” this speech would be quite neutral. However, by explicitly referencing China’s 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution—which was brutally implemented by Mao Zedong—Morales has touched upon a topic that is taboo for the Chinese government, which is largely intent on erasing the catastrophic event.⁶⁶ By capitalizing upon his own history of democratic elections, Morales highlights the differences between the progress made in Bolivia and China with diction that seems decidedly tactical.

Much of Morales’ reticence to rhetorically bandwagon himself and his nation with China seems to stem from the somewhat-contentious development and trade relationships between the two nations. Significantly, while the average trade imbalance between all Latin American nations and China is 2:1, Bolivia’s imbalance is over 4:1 (the nation imports \$4.2 in goods from China for

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Barbara Demick. 2021. “Uncovering the Cultural Revolution’s Awful Truths.” The Atlantic. February 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/01/chinas-rebel-historians/617265/>.

every dollar of goods exported).⁶⁷ Equally significant, since 2025, China has become Bolivia's largest creditor, with a debt of \$533 million owed to Chinese financial institutions by the Bolivian government.⁶⁸ Morales has strategically omitted mention of this imbalance from his rhetoric, even as debt is likely to constitute a threat to the Bolivian leader's efforts in developing a self-sufficient economic system. In 2017 Morales stated that

*"The submissive without a voice before the empire are from the culture of dependency, without defense of our dignity and sovereignty."*⁶⁹

While not a specific rebuke of China, Morales' statement aligns with his longstanding view that national sovereignty a paramount consideration in alliance-formation. Particularly, the usage of the word "our" serves as a delineation between the nations that are "submissive without a voice" due to economic dependency on major powers and those who are dignified and independent.

In contrast, Morales depicts Russia and Bolivia as "fraternal nations" and frequently claims Vladimir Putin as a "brother." Rhetoric that refers to brotherhood invokes a relationship that extends beyond necessary political or economic alliances and indicates that Morales sees Russia as a dependable ally who shares both values and the expectation of fair and respectful treatment. For example, in a speech given at the 2019 joint press conference with Russia following Russian-Bolivian negotiations, Morales claims that

⁶⁷ Ellis, Evan. 2015. "Chinese Engagement with Bolivia: Resources, Business Opportunities, and Strategic Location." AIR & SPACE POWER JOURNAL. https://www.academia.edu/25467073/Chinese_Engagement_with_Bolivia_Resources_Business_Opportunities_and_Strategic_Location.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2017. "Los sumisos sin voz ante el imperio son de la cultura de la dependencia, sin defensa de nuestra dignidad y soberanía." Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/850001970467360768>.

“It is the President of Russia who leads the efforts to...prevent...interference in the internal life of other countries, and to uphold the sovereignty of states. We are acting shoulder to shoulder [and] Russia is a truly fraternal country.”⁷⁰

In this instance, Morales presents Putin as a global leader in promoting an agenda centered on equality and sovereignty. By invoking the imagery of Putin and Morales standing shoulder to shoulder, Morales depicts himself and the Russian leader as equals who hold the same vision rather than a dynamic that fosters an unbalanced relationship. Thus, for Morales, allyship with Putin does not only represent economic benefits but also the development of a close alliance that emphasizes equality.

Morales’ view that China has the potential to engage in the detrimental activity characteristic of hegemons has become more explicit since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a 2020 interview, Morales concisely acknowledged that China is locked in a competition with other global powers:

“I think that China won World War III without firing a single weapon.”⁷¹

By drawing comparisons between other episodes of great power conflict (e.g. WWI and WWII) with his reference to World War III, Morales highlights that China not only seeks power but is also playing to win. He uses his rhetoric to ensure that his audience sees China as a nation that possesses significant military might and is also in the position of being able to leverage its other resources in order to dominate those that oppose its trajectory.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Argentina, Cadena 3. 2020. “Evo Morales: “China ganó la 3ª Guerra Mundial sin disparar.” Cadena 3 Argentina. April 13, 2020.
https://www.cadena3.com/noticia/internacionales/evo-morales-china-gano-la-3-guerra-mundial-sin-disparar_257373

Morales' additional remarks in this 2020 interview are far more ambiguous as he claims that

*“In the context of a global ideological conflict, and taking into consideration certain geopolitical interests, I think that it [COVID-19] was something planned, something triggered for this fight, a war of a biological and economic nature.”*⁷²

Morales adopts a passive tone, avoiding directly stating that China intentionally developed and released the COVID-19 virus. However, his constant references to “war” and “conflict” indicate that Morales recognizes China as a nation that has the capacity to influence ideology and interests, especially in the contemporary era of increased competition between the United States and China. Albeit indirectly, Morales paints China as an actor capable of geopolitical strategizing in order to advance its own interests.

Supplementing Morales' concerns regarding the potential threat posed by conflict between the United States and China is the significant history of failed Chinese aid and development projects. Many Chinese-led and implemented projects have resulted in accusations of mistreatment,⁷³ terms that are disadvantageous to the Bolivian government, and injuries of Bolivian workers (such as when a containment pond built by the Chinese company Jungie Mining burst in 2014, injuring 18).⁷⁴ Furthermore, Morales' initial praise for a 2018 arms deals offered without the

⁷² “Bajo una pugna mundial, bajo ciertos intereses de carácter geopolítico pienso que es algo planificado, algo provocado para esa lucha, esa guerra de carácter biológico y económico.”

⁷³ Ellis, Evan. 2015. “Chinese Engagement with Bolivia: Resources, Business Opportunities, and Strategic Location.” AIR & SPACE POWER JOURNAL. https://www.academia.edu/25467073/Chinese_Engagement_with_Bolivia_Resources_Business_Opportunities_and_Strategic_Location.

⁷⁴ Most notably, El Mutún Steel Complex Project has proven to be a particularly thorny issue for the Bolivian government. In 2017, China Eximbank and the Bolivian government signed a \$396,134,000 preferential buyer's credit to develop the facility. In negotiations in 2010, however, the Chinese government proposed a loan of \$15 billion provided that Chinese company Chung Hsing Mining get contracts for key areas of the work. The Bolivian government declined this conditional offer. The project has continued to be marred by delays. (Ellis pp. 8).

conditions imposed by the United States and its allies⁷⁵ dissipated when complaints emerged from military officers about the durability and quality of the military equipment.⁷⁶ In fact, in examining donated Chinese military vehicles, Bolivian experts estimated that the average lifespan was fewer than five years, with at least one episode fostering particular frustration when almost all of the donated Chinese equipment broke down soon after arrival to Bolivia.⁷⁷ Morales has made little subsequent mention to Chinese arms deals since 2018. In contrast, Morales has sought to expand arms deals with Russia. In a 2019 interview with Russian media source Sputnik, Morales highlighted his approval of security purchases. He cited the Bolivian Air Force, saying that this military branch “recommended” that the Bolivian state purchase Russian helicopters and expressed approval of Russia’s development of one of the world’s largest helicopters by joking “now *that’s* a plane!”⁷⁸

For Morales, the detrimental and unpopular aspects of an economic partnership with China have likely tempered the allure of complete rhetorical bandwagoning. Additionally, Morales tweets of the long-term foreign policy implications:

⁷⁵ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2018. “Gracias a la cooperación de la República Popular #China entregamos equipamiento militar a las FFAA. Consta de 10 vehículos blindados, 4 purificadores de agua, 10 camiones cisterna y 536 visores nocturnos. Respondemos así a necesidades de logística de nuestras unidades militares. <https://t.co/VW8vnMoQBR>.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1024029273240350725>.

⁷⁶ Ellis, Evan. 2015. “Chinese Engagement with Bolivia: Resources, Business Opportunities, and Strategic Location.” AIR & SPACE POWER JOURNAL. https://www.academia.edu/25467073/Chinese_Engagement_with_Bolivia_Resources_Business_Opportunities_and_Strategic_Location.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Carlos E. Hernández. 2019. “Morales Ratifica El Interés de Bolivia En Comprar Helicópteros Rusos.” Infodefensa - Noticias de Defensa, Industria, Seguridad, Armamento, Ejércitos y Tecnología de La Defensa. July 16, 2019. <https://www.infodefensa.com/texto-diario/mostrar/3129996/morales-ratifica-interes-bolivia-comprar-helicopteros-rusos>.

“Here we Bolivians decide our economy, we have our own model, an alliance with all sectors. I have thought of holding international events with experts and discussing how we can prevent...the trade war between China and the US from [affecting] Bolivia.”⁷⁹

Morales repeatedly invokes words such as “we” and “I” to not only establish his own authority but to also establish Bolivia as an independent nation in the face of an impending “trade war” between two superpowers. This tweet also demonstrates Morales’ ability to lay aside colorful political rhetoric when necessary; the Bolivian leader is unambiguously concerned about the impact of a trade war and the impacts that this will have on Bolivia. Morales also seeks to establish authority on this matter via the gathering of experts, demonstrating both his leadership and his ability to draw upon outside sources of information when faced with potential concern.

Ultimately, Morales’ rhetorical approach toward China reflects uncharacteristic measurement. A leader who is exceptionally vocal regarding his opinions (e.g. against the United States or for Russia), Morales has been less prolific about voicing his opinions on China than he has about Russia. This hedging likely reflects concern regarding the detrimental impact that rhetorical bandwagoning with China may have for Bolivia in terms of sovereignty, economic freedom, and development. Indicative of an unpopular legacy of continued issues of Chinese development projects in the nation, Morales’ tempered approach to China is shared by the Bolivian public. In a 2018/2019 AmericasBarometer poll, for instance, only 35% of Bolivians expressed that they trusted the Chinese government, constituting the second lowest level of trust in Latin America.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2019. “Aquí los bolivianos decidimos nuestra economía, tenemos un modelo propio, una alianza con todos los sectores. He pensado hacer eventos internacionales con expertos y debatir cómo podemos evitar que la crisis en Argentina o la guerra comercial entre China y EEUU afecten a Bolivia. <https://t.co/Cj0vQpIutN>.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1161330398196129804>.

⁸⁰ Eric Asen. 2020. “Spotlight on Trust in the Chinese Government in Latin America and the Caribbean.” Vanderbilt University. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/spotlights/Spotlight-Asen-MIL10A-eng-final.pdf>.

Even as Morales maintains a tempered rhetorical approach to China, he recognizes the benefits of a multi-faceted alignment strategy. As a result, he supports Bolivian connections to a third-party nation—Russia. By drawing rhetorical connections supportive of the Russian Federation, Morales seems to be fostering and ameliorating a true multipolar system, one that he has asserted will allow Bolivia to profit both economically and politically in the face of any threat that would be posed by bandwagoning with China.

Support of Russia's "Territorial Defense" and Controversial Issues

Morales' overtures with regard to alliance-building with Russia contrast with the historical dynamic emblematic of the region's dealings with hegemons. During the Cold War era, for instance, both the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a proxy conflict that resulted in a spate of U.S.-backed dictatorships across the continent. Morales' rhetoric reflects his aspiration of developing strategic alliances that would specifically counter a scenario reminiscent of the Cold War in the contemporary dynamics between China and the United States. In other words, developing closer alliances with Russia suggests that Morales is recognizing and bracing against the possibility of a return to bipolarity between American and Chinese hegemonic powers.

By utilizing political rhetorical strategies, Morales positions Russia as not only a well-intentioned actor on the global stage but also one that offers certain strategic benefits to Bolivia that China is able to adequately replicate. Morales employs critical omission in his discussions of Russia, failing to mention Russian tactics that could be equated to comparable actions by global hegemonic players. Rather than deflecting blame or emphasizing the advantages of a Russian alliance, the Bolivian leader instead omits information or uses more

subtle forms of half-truths or out-of-context information that is difficult to refute. This technique—propaganda by omission—frames the narrative and can skew how an audience perceives the information.⁸¹ Consequently, these critical omissions can minimize adverse reactions from the national and international communities during a time when support of Russia is viewed generally negatively. Even as Morales has long isolated the United States and its NATO allies, he recognizes the need to minimize certain instances of Russian aggression that could be equated with similar actions taken by the United States. To do so, Morales has been vocal in his support for Russia throughout controversial events but has often framed his views in a way that condemns the United States while praising Russia for its “defense” of its sovereignty in light of supposed Western encroachment. Morales is a leader savvy enough to recognize that in order to sell his nation on the prospect of an alliance that is both durable and beneficial to LATAM nations, he must promote Russia as an ally that is potentially uniquely better than any other hegemon in its geopolitical practices. Indeed, Morales maintains that Russia is forced to respond to supposed American and NATO interventionism in Eastern Europe. This supposition is supported by Morales’ remarks that

“NATO is a serious threat to international peace and security; its history of invasions and aggressions prove it. Now, its expansionist delusions are one of the major factors for the situation in Ukraine.”⁸²

With no mention of the Russian Federation in this tweet, Morales critically omits the role of Russia in invading Ukraine and instead places the blame of NATO’s “expansionist claim[s]” as one of the primary drivers for the war. The idea of retribution inflicted by the United States and

⁸¹ Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. 1981. “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice.” *Science* 211 (4481): 453–58.

⁸² Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2022. “La OTAN es una seria amenaza a la paz y a la seguridad internacionales, su historial de invasiones y agresiones lo demuestran. Ahora, su pretensión expansionista es una de las grandes responsables de la situación en Ucrania.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1497333153970720774>.

NATO against Russia is indicative of Morales' position that Russia is not at fault for the conflict and that its current political position is a continuation of a consistent pattern of reacting to the United States and NATO's allegedly provocative actions. Ultimately, Evo Morales strategically uses rhetorical omission in order to foster a warped impression of Russian interventionism. Morales clearly hopes to highlight that Bolivia's economic and political alliance with the Federation establishes that Russia is not a liability in terms of allegiance. Highlighting the violations of sovereignty committed by Russia in Ukraine would be detrimental to the coherence of Morales' condemnation of interventionist states. This approach also serves to establish Russian expertise in combatting NATO encroachment. Russia, per Morales, is responding in order to reclaim its territory that has fallen to the "expansionist delusions" of NATO. NATO has long drawn the ire of Morales; that Russia is combatting an organization that Morales perceives as a serious threat serves to enhance its credibility and value as an ally. In contrast, China's military, one of the largest in the world, has never trialled its military prowess in a major conflict, much less against the Western nations comprising NATO. As a leader who has emphasized the importance of resistance to expansionist efforts, Morales may perceive Russia as a battle-tested choice for allyship in opposing the contemporary global order.

Morales' history of offering support to Russia has extended beyond the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Unlike many of his Latin American peers, Morales has long been supportive of Russia in its handling of controversial issues, a gesture that has not been extended to China.

Statements of Support Offered to Russia and China on Controversial Issues

EVENT	COUNTRY	SUPPORT OFFERED BY MORALES = NO/YES	EVENT	COUNTRY	SUPPORT OFFERED BY MORALES = NO/YES
Human rights abuses of Uyghurs and/or Xinjiang	CHINA	NO	2014 Annexation of Crimea	RUSSIA	YES
Hong Kong Democracy	CHINA	NO	2022 invasion of Ukraine	RUSSIA	YES
Taiwan/One China Policy	CHINA	YES (One tweet addressing Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit)	Chemical weapon use in Syria	RUSSIA	YES
Nine-Dash Line/ South China Sea Territorial Dispute	CHINA	NO	Expulsion of Russian diplomats from European nations following the 2018 poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal	RUSSIA	YES

FIGURE 1: Statements of Support Offered to Russia and China on Controversial Issues

Morales' support, in part, likely stems from his desire to promote Russia as an ally that is faced with circumstances similar to Bolivia. Russia, per Morales, has been forced to react to encroachments by NATO and the United States and persecution by the broader international community. To this end, Morales has consistently depicted Russia as a nation which has both the right and the know-how to maintain its sovereignty and defend its historical territories, leading to Morales' support of the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. However, Morales' support of controversial Russian actions has not been limited to territorial issues—reflecting Morales' broader support for Russian efforts to reinsert itself as a leader in the global order. For instance, Morales has backed Russia in its dealings in Syria and condemned the expulsion of Russian diplomats from European nations following the 2014 poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. These gestures serve as an indicator of Morales' positive perception of Russian efforts to counter the Western order, even if his support has the potential to result in costs and condemnation.

In contrast, controversies involving China –which are often related to efforts of expansionism (e.g. the nine-dash line) or the Chinese party line (e.g. denying human rights abuses of Uyghurs)– are met with no concrete support or remarks from Morales. With regard to Taiwan, Morales has offered only one statement on the Taiwan/ One-China policy which followed Nancy Pelosi’s 2022 visit. While this may reflect Morales’ concern about Western expansionism and interventionism, it is important to note that China regards adhering to the one-China policy as a minimum formality for diplomatic and economic relations with mainland China, a fact that Morales is likely cognizant of.⁸³ Thus, Morales’ support of issues involving Russia extend beyond what may be expected of a typical economic or diplomatic alliance while the lack of equivalent support extended to China is indicative of a minimal level of support needed to maintain ties.

Morales’ assessments and depictions of Russia in his rhetoric have translated into concrete actions taken by the Bolivian state. For instance, the April 2022 expulsion of Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council following the massacre of civilians in the Ukrainian town of Bucha highlights how elements of Morales’ rhetoric have manifested in Bolivian decision-making. In this vote, Bolivia, with only 24 other nations, opted to vote against the resolution to suspend Russia from its role on the Human Rights Council. Bolivia’s “no” vote is significant in itself given that many nations opt to abstain from such votes to avoid isolating themselves from either the West and NATO alliance or from Moscow.⁸⁴ This vote, spearheaded

⁸³ “Questions and Answers Concerning the Taiwan Question (2):What Is the One-China Principle? What Is the Basis of the One-China Principle?” 2022. Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the European Union. August 15, 2022. http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/20220812Taiwan/202208/t20220815_10743591.htm.

⁸⁴ Raquel Alberto De La Fuente, Tess Gibson, and Richard Gowan. 2023. “What Can UN Votes Tell Us About Russia’s War in Ukraine?” World Politics Review. February 21, 2023. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/un-ukraine-resolution-russia-united-nations-vote-putin-war/?share=email&messages%5B0%5D=one-time-read-success>.

by the current Bolivian government dominated by members of Morales' MAS party, is a continuation of a trend established during Morales' regime. Examination of an index of country votes in the UN condemning Russia between 2014 and 2022 (including the 2014 UN resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, the 2022 UN resolution on aggression against Ukraine, and the 2016-21 votes on human rights in Crimea and militarisation in Crimea and the Black Sea) reveals that Bolivia is one of Russia's closest diplomatic allies, condemning Russia less than 25% of the time in UN votes. In contrast, other Latin American nations, such as Brazil and Argentina, condemn Russia more than 50% of the time in UN votes during the same time-frame.⁸⁵ By encouraging voting in alignment with Russian interests in forums such as the United Nations, maintaining support of Russia throughout its controversies, and depicting Russia as an experienced defender against Western encroachment, Morales demonstrates consistent alignment with Russia.

Economic Advantages of Allyship with Russia

Morales extols the benefits Bolivians will reap in their alliance with Russia through the Federation's aid in developing mineral and energy sectors.

In 2019, following a state visit to Russia, Morales underscored the economic and development programs resulting from this successful diplomatic mission:

*"I am very grateful to brother Vladimir Putin, President of #Russia for his congratulations and ratification to ensure the continuation of joint investment projects and technological, scientific and industrial development for the benefit of our people. #Bolivia and Russia are brother countries."*⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Foa, Roberto, Margot Mollat, Han Isha, Xavier Romero-Vidal, David Evans, and Andrew Klassen. 2022. "A World Divided: Russia, China and the West." Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.90281>.

⁸⁶ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2020. "Son esperanzadores los avances de Rusia, China, Reino Unido, Cuba y Bélgica para que una vacuna termine definitivamente con la pandemia que azota al mundo. #Bolivia debe dejar

Diverging from the “us vs them” rhetoric that has become a hallmark of Morales’ interactions with major powers, the Bolivian leader uses fraternal rhetoric in order to establish his authority as a leader of “our people.” He thanks “brother Vladimir Putin” for programs such as the development of a Nuclear Research and Technology Centre in Bolivia courtesy of the economic and technological assistance provided by Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy cooperation. He further strengthens the connection between Russia and Bolivia by repeating a reference to kinship: “Bolivia and Russia are brother countries.”⁸⁷ While this project was certainly a centerpiece of Morales and Putin’s 2019 meeting, it also launched other initiatives for Russian investments in the country. These include continued investments by Gazprom—the Russian state gas company—into the oil and natural gas sectors in Bolivia, continued cooperation regarding agricultural exports from Bolivia to Russia, investments in upgrading the international airport in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and, ambitiously, support in building a transoceanic railway corridor.⁸⁸ Morales’ Twitter missive at this time is indicative of many strategies used to emphasize the benefits of developing a strategic economic and political alliance.

Equally significant is Morales’ emphasis on the benefits of such an alliance “for the people” of Bolivia. Morales indicates he is in favor of the benefits Bolivians will reap from Russian investment in the nation, establishing himself as a mouthpiece for Bolivia who has the best interests of his nation in mind: that of a multipolar global order. Thus, the prospect of a colonialist type of exploitation by a major power is significantly minimized with Morales’

cualquier diferencia ideológica y trabajar con todos los países para que nadie quede sin ser vacunado.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1304815134129389570>.

⁸⁷ “Press Statements Following Russian-Bolivian Talks • President of Russia.” 2019. President of Russia. July 11, 2019. http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/60982.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

rhetoric. Commemorating a visit to a Russian university during his 2019 state visit, Morales shared his views regarding Bolivian growth:

*“The Bolivian experience: from being practically a colony of the #USA, we are now the fastest growing economy in South America. I salute the accompaniment of the Russian Federation with whom we have a shared alignment toward addressing world problems.”*⁸⁹

Morales states that Bolivia and Russia share an “overlap in the global problems” to address and casts American involvement in Bolivia as colonization while complimenting the Russian initiative to become economically involved with Bolivia in order to solve global challenges as equals on the global stage.

Since the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, Morales has continued to cast Russia as a nation on the vanguard of scientific innovation—in part due to the Federation’s claim of developing the first vaccine against the coronavirus. In a 2020 tweet, Morales writes that

*“The progress made in developing a vaccine to definitively end the pandemic that is plaguing the world by Russia, China, the United Kingdom, Cuba, and Belgium is encouraging.”*⁹⁰

Significant is the ordering of the countries listed by Morales as making significant advances in vaccine development; Russia precedes China, indicating that Morales likely favors Russia in its efforts to eradicate the pandemic, despite broad international skepticism regarding the efficacy of

⁸⁹ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2019. “Compartimos con los hermanos de @UniversityRudn la experiencia boliviana: de ser prácticamente una colonia de #EEUU, ahora somos la economía que más crece en Sudamérica. Saludo el acompañamiento de Rusia, Federación con la que tenemos coincidencias sobre la problemática mundial <https://t.co/Y1Vcw88VI6>.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1149266314499887104>.

⁹⁰ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2020. “Son esperanzadores los avances de Rusia, China, Reino Unido, Cuba y Bélgica para que una vacuna termine definitivamente con la pandemia que azota al mundo. #Bolivia debe dejar cualquier diferencia ideológica y trabajar con todos los países para que nadie quede sin ser vacunado.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1304815134129389570>.

a Russian vaccine.⁹¹ In subsequent tweets, Morales doubles down on the benefits of Russian science in combatting the pandemic within Bolivian borders:

“Russia, China, and Cuba can reinforce Bolivian efforts with their science, technology, and medical assistance.”⁹²

Again, Morales used strategic word order in order to place Russia ahead of China. Morales favors the development of a strong relationship with the Federation in order to “fortify” Bolivia’s scientific and technological spheres.

Morales’ views have clearly been fostered courtesy of a significant effort on the part of the Russian Federation to foster goodwill via significant initiatives such as the Nuclear Research and Technology Centre. This Center for Research and Development in Nuclear Technology (CIDTN), a program initiated in 2017 while Morales was president, demonstrates long-term investment in the nation. One security expert and member of the advisory team of Peru’s Congressional Intelligence Commission notes that projects such as the Center for Research and Development in Nuclear Technology (CIDTN) demonstrate at least a decade-long commitment to development: “the Kremlin is already involved there; it’s not going to leave. [The CIDTN] is a long-term project.”⁹³ In contrast, China’s involvement with technology initiatives lack a substantial long-term prospectus. For example, a lauded 2013 Bolivian satellite launch, funded by a \$251 million loan from the China Development Bank⁹⁴ and developed with Chinese

⁹¹ King, Anthony. 2022. “New Questions Raised over Sputnik Covid Vaccine Results Point to Fraudulent Practices.” Chemistry World. June 23, 2022. <https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/new-questions-raised-over-sputnik-covid-vaccine-results-point-to-fraudulent-practices/4015862.article>.

⁹² Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2020. “La catástrofe de la pandemia necesitaba un acuerdo nacional que no quiso el gobierno de facto, y movilizar el apoyo internacional que tampoco pudo; Rusia, China y Cuba pueden reforzar los esfuerzos bolivianos con su ciencia, tecnología y brigadas médicas. #VamosASalirAdelante.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1287704984524599296>.

⁹³ Julieta Pelcastre. 2023. “Russia Gains Foothold in Bolivia with Nuclear Plant Project.” Diálogo Américas (blog). June 20, 2023. <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/russia-gains-foothold-in-bolivia-with-nuclear-plant-project/>.

⁹⁴ Redacción Diario Página Siete. 2013. “Evo Morales viajará a China para el lanzamiento del satélite Tupac Katari.” www.paginasiete.bo. November 27, 2013.

assistance, has a limited life-span of 15 years.⁹⁵ No contingency plan has been made available for its impending functional termination or to address the concerns raised in a 2019 press conference by the director of the Bolivian Space Agency highlighting that the satellite is functioning at “average” or “below average” capabilities.⁹⁶

Long-term vs. short-term scientific endeavors by great powers as a goodwill strategy may be indicative of political trust. Morales has explicitly addressed concerns about the potential for the abuse of technology and innovation in a 2014 G-77 speech:

“We express our concern that science, technology, and innovation may be misused as instruments that limit and undermine the sovereignty of countries.”⁹⁷

By emphasizing that the tools in scientific and technological spheres have the potential for political ramifications that impact a nation’s independence, Morales demonstrates that he is savvy to the implications that come with development benefits. The wording of “instruments” also implies explicit intent on the part of nations that are prone to undermining sovereignty; these tools of soft power may still have a profoundly detrimental impact in the event of their misuse.

Ultimately, Morales’ rhetoric reflects his aspiration of developing strategic alliances that would allow for hedging against China. Morales’ goal is complemented by an emphasis on multipolarity developed by the Russian Federation as it seeks to develop relationships with other

<https://www.paginasiete.bo/sociedad/evo-morales-viajara-a-china-para-el-lanzamiento-del-satelite-tupac-katari-XCP S7132>.

⁹⁵ “FICHA TÉCNICA TKSAT-1.” 2013. Agencia Boliviana Espacial. December 18, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150523003641/http://www.abe.bo/fichatecnica.html>.

⁹⁶ El Diario. 2019. “Satélite T. Katari, un elefante blanco.” www.eldiario.net. February 28, 2019.

http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2019/2019_02/nt190228/editorial.php?n=21&.

⁹⁷ Ministerio de Comunicación Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. 2015. “Bolivia G77 + China · Discursos del Presidente Evo Morales.” OLA. November 2015.

<https://observatorylatinamerica.org/es/bolivia-g77-china-discursos-del-presidente-evo-morales/>. *“Expresamos nuestra preocupación por que la ciencia, la tecnología y la innovación puedan ser utilizadas indebidamente como instrumentos para limitar y socavar la soberanía de los países.”* pp. 137.

nations interested in a system designed to provide an explicit alternative to a unipolar or bipolar system. Morales' rhetoric indicates that he believes his state is a nation that faces pressure from international hegemons and would thus benefit from expanded ties with Russia in order to provide a sustainable alternative in economic and political domains. Morales' supportive rhetoric toward Russia serves as a hedge against China, permitting for the diversification of alliance-building strategies.

Additional Considerations

Two additional contentions, however, merit exploration. The first is that Russian appeals to ideals such as sovereignty, multipolarity, financial independence, and freedom from neocolonialism are so uniquely effective that Morales is willing to express preferential alignment for Russia on this consideration alone. In sum, what material or reputational benefits Russia offers to Bolivia (e.g. trade deals, development packages, and alternative allyship options) are less important than the vision of multipolarity that Russia promotes. In a context of China's rise to great power status, Russia's popularity with Morales could signify that Russia understands how to appeal to such heads of state in ways that China does not.

Second, Morales is a self-interested actor.⁹⁸ Russia has an interest in supporting anti-Western regimes and leaders. Morales, who falls firmly into this camp, may benefit from continued Russian political support. This is particularly true given that Morales is planning another presidential run for the 2025 election. The benefits incurred from Morales' relationship with Russia are particularly relevant given that Morales has had a complicated relationship with

⁹⁸ This has been most clearly manifested in the 2019 election. Morales, facing the prospect of run-off second round vote as stipulated by the Bolivian constitution in the event that no candidate receives a ten-point margin of victory, resisted the democratic process in order to maintain power. Eventually, Morales resigned and fled the country.

Chinese entities, resulting in one major corruption scandal. As a result, rhetorical support for Russia may serve as a smokescreen for Morales in order to divert popular criticism from his dealings with the Chinese.

Examining the 2023 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation may be revealing in appraising the potential alignment between Morales' interests and the Federation's. Most explicitly, the Concept places an emphasis on "eliminating the global system of colonialism," "maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system," and "supporting interested Latin American states under pressure from the United States and its allies in securing sovereignty and independence."⁹⁹ These stated goals all closely align with Morales' personal and political rhetoric, and support the development of a strong alliance with the Russian Federation. Both Russia and Morales have emphasized "the imbalanced model of world development which has for centuries ensured the advanced economic growth of colonial powers through the appropriation of resources of dependent territories and states."¹⁰⁰ The Russian Federation explicitly emphasizes the need to support Latin American countries on a "pragmatic, de-ideologized and mutually beneficial basis."¹⁰¹ Russia's conceptualization closely aligns with both Morales's approach toward geopolitics—most particularly in its emphasis on the creation of a multipolar system that emphasizes independence and decolonization. Consequently, Morales may focus less on foreign policy plans contingent on a specific outcome (e.g. strategic economic and diplomatic alliances that counter Latin America's position as a pawn between the United

⁹⁹ "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation." 2023. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. March 31, 2023. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

States and China) and instead emphasize Russia's broader vision for foreign policy and the role of the Global South in an era of shifting global power dynamics.

However, this explanation does not entirely explain Morales' preference for the Russian Federation as opposed to the PRC. China's model of operation in the Global South is supposedly dictated by the guiding principles of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence"¹⁰² and the "Bandung Spirit."¹⁰³ Developed at the Bandung Conference in 1955 by Mao Zedong's chief diplomat, these ideals supposedly stipulate a path of non-aggression and non-interference in China's dealings with other nations.¹⁰⁴ China's values have manifested in the 2023 "Proposal of the People's Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance," which advocates for systems that "uphold multilateralism...oppose unilateralism and protectionism, and respect the social systems and development paths of different countries."¹⁰⁵ Official Chinese statements have also condemned the actions of a "certain country" (ostensibly the United States), for its "wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction."¹⁰⁶ Such rhetoric is similar to the language used by both Morales and the Russian Federation.

Thus, China's statements are, in many respects, on par both with the sentiments expressed by Russia in the 2023 Concept of the Foreign Policy and Morales' own rhetoric. The premise

¹⁰² These are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

¹⁰³ "Carry Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence To Build a Better World Through Win-Win Cooperation." 2014. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. June 28, 2014. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201407/t20140701_678184.html.

¹⁰⁴ The Economist. 2023. "China Wants to Be the Leader of the Global South," September 21, 2023. <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/09/21/china-wants-to-be-the-leader-of-the-global-south>.

¹⁰⁵ "Proposal of the People's Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance." 2023. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. September 13, 2023. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202309/t20230913_11142010.html.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Morales favors Russia primarily due to the success in the promotion of its values and positions seems, at best, unlikely. This is particularly relevant given that China, on the surface, has the potential to offer better trade and development options to Bolivia, which makes Russia a less appealing choice for allyship.

A second potential explanation centers on a supposition that engaging in pro-Russian rhetoric results in personal and political benefits for Morales that China would be unable to match. With a planned 2025 presidential run, Morales may see similarities between himself and Putin. In 2008, Putin was constitutionally barred from running for reelection. As a result, Russia was plunged into a tandemocracy, with Dmitry Medvedev nominally serving as a president until Putin reclaimed the presidency in the 2012—a position that he has held ever since.¹⁰⁷ Morales, who is planning his own political comeback, admires the support that Putin has garnered from his electoral base, as based on a 2018 tweet praising Putin on his reelection with almost 77% of the electoral base.¹⁰⁸

“We salute our brother president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, who today begins his 4th term, after being re-elected by his people with 76.7% of the vote.”

Putin’s establishment of a base was likely appealing to Morales, who is struggling to consolidate his once powerful electorate after accusations of democratic backsliding. Morales highlights the relevant numbers that emphasize Putin’s strength as a leader, a rhetorical technique that serves to enumerate Putin’s popularity and allows Morales to underscore his equivalent history. In addition

¹⁰⁷ Harding, Luke. 2020. “Dmitry Medvedev: The Rise and Fall of the Robin to Putin’s Batman.” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2020, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/dmitry-medvedev-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-robin-to-putins-batman>.

¹⁰⁸ Evo Morales Ayma [@evoespueblo]. 2018. “Saludamos al hermano presidente de Rusia, Vladimir Putin, que hoy inicia su 4to mandato, después de ser reelecto por su pueblo con el 76.7% de votación. Rusia garantiza el equilibrio político e integración de los pueblos, ante las arremetidas intervencionistas de EEUU. <https://t.co/vwFWFb96uP>.” Tweet. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/993430742544855041>.

to his overwhelming popularity with the Bolivian people (71% of the Bolivian population expressed approval of Morales in 2015), Morales enjoyed the added legitimacy of being the first Bolivian president since 1982 to have been elected without a congressional second round—a record that was held until Morales’ 2019 resignation and one which likely bolstered his legitimacy as a leader. The Chinese electoral model, however, does not allow Morales to draw equivalency between his own popular legitimacy and the head of a larger nation.

Russia has contributed to support Morales even as the Bolivian leader has faced significant political challenges. For instance, after Morales was accused of manipulating the outcome of the 2019 elections, Russian officials supported Morales’ rhetoric by claiming that a “coup” was committed against him. Accordingly, Russian officials issued a statement lamenting that “the [Morales’] government’s readiness to seek constructive solutions through dialogue was swept away by the development of events in the mold of an orchestrated coup.”¹⁰⁹ This statement’s rhetoric is identical to Morales’ portrayal of the election and its aftermath. In contrast, China offered no statement addressing the 2019 elections. Additionally, following Morales’ 2019 ouster, Margarita Simonyan, the head of Russian state-funded media source RT, took to Twitter to offer the former president a job as a presenter on RT’s Spanish-language service.¹¹⁰ Even though Morales did not accept, this acknowledgment likely signifies that Morales’ pro-Russia rhetoric has not gone unnoticed by influential Russian media leaders and could result in personal benefits.

¹⁰⁹ “Russia Accuses Bolivian Opposition of Unleashing Wave of Violence as Morales Resigns.” 2019. The Moscow Times. November 11, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/11/russia-accuses-bolivian-opposition-of-unleashing-wave-of-violence-as-morales-resigns-a68118>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

In addition to official acknowledgments of support from Russia, unsubstantiated reports depict Russian officials, companies, and consultants taking steps to meddle in Bolivia's election. Proekt, an independent Russian investigative outlet, published claims that "a group of Kremlin-related Russian political consultants" were hired by Rosatom, Russia's atomic energy corporation, in order to ensure that Morales would be re-elected and protect their investments in the country.¹¹¹ Carlos Mesa, Morales' opponent in the 2019 presidential race, allegedly prompted Russian concerns that, should he be elected, he would renege on lucrative contracts with Russia in order to favor the United States. To prevent such an outcome, per Proekt, around ten Kremlin-affiliated political consultants relocated to Bolivia in order to run "black PR campaigns" against Morales' opponents.¹¹² Furthermore, Proekt has investigated claims that actors close to Morales have sought to use the "PRISM" system. Also used by the Kremlin, this software "analyzes the interest of the blogosphere to certain problems and warns of possible reputational risks."¹¹³ While the Russian company that produces the software did not confirm involvement with the Bolivian government specifically, they have acknowledged the existence of a Spanish-language version. Naturally, neither Bolivian nor Russian leaders have offered any statements that would confirm or deny such claims of Russian interference. However, even the existence of such allegations is an indicator that Morales may perceive support of Russia as an endeavor that could aid in eliminating opposition.

In contrast, Morales' dealings with China have been fraught with controversy that has resulted in personal and political damage. Most notably, a 2016 corruption scandal linked Morales' personal

¹¹¹ Команда «Проекта». 2019. "Coca & Co." Проект. October 23, 2019. <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/morales-rosatom-eng/>.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

life to accusations of influence-peddling in state-issued contracts with Chinese firms.¹¹⁴ Morales' former romantic partner, Gabriela Zapata, served as a senior executive at the China CAMC Engineering Co. (CAMC). CAMC received seven contracts from the Bolivian government, totaling \$600 million. Of the seven contracts, six did not involve any bidding, indicating that CAMC had the contracts in-hand during the application process.¹¹⁵ Zapata allegedly lobbied on behalf of her company; by writing letters to Morales' administration advocating for contracts for CAMC she created a distinct conflict of interests given her relationship with the president, with whom she supposedly had a child.¹¹⁶ This 2016 scandal, materializing at an inflection point of Morales' political career,¹¹⁷ generated intense controversy and scrutiny. Morales promptly denied any allegations of Chinese influence-peddling and sought to redirect public attention. To do so, Morales' minister of the presidency released a government-funded documentary called "the Cartel of Lies" ("*El Cártel de la Mentira*") characterized by intense criticism of those critical of Morales. Distributed in movie theaters and the Ministry of the Presidency's official Youtube account,¹¹⁸ Morales' defensive rhetoric is prevalent throughout, claiming that corruption allegations amount to a "great lie attacking a society" (*gran engaño contra una sociedad*) and that investigations into influence-mongering with Chinese companies are a political attack ungrounded in reality.

¹¹⁴ AFP. 2016. "Bolivian President Fends off Corruption Claims: 'We Have Nothing to Hide.'" The Guardian, February 11, 2016, sec. World news.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/bolivia-president-evo-morales-corruption-investigation>.

¹¹⁵ "Bolivia's Evo Morales Faces Questions About a Lover, Their Child, and Her Chinese Employer." 2016. Vice News. March 2, 2016.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/gy98kb/bolivias-evo-morales-faces-questions-about-a-lover-their-child-and-her-chinese-employer>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ In February 2016, Morales held a critical referendum vote that would have premitted him to run for a fourth presidential term. He lost by a narrow margin.

¹¹⁸ Paola Nalvarte. 2016. "Bolivian Government Releases Documentary 'The Cartel of Lies' with Attacks on the Press; Journalists React." LatAm Journalism Review by the Knight Center. December 20, 2016.

<https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/bolivian-government-releases-documentary-the-cartel-of-lies-with-attacks-on-the-press-journalists-react/>.

It seems that alignment with Russia offers Morales better personal benefits than those that would be accrued from an association with China. Morales admires Putin and his popularity and re-electibility but also likely recognizes tangible benefits that can result from friendly rhetoric, such as job offers from Russian-affiliated media as well as more surreptitious perks such as influencing election results. In contrast, Morales' high-profile scandal involving Chinese enterprises and a dearth of tangible support from Beijing in the form of equivalent offers likely enhanced Morales' view that rhetorical support of Beijing may prove to be personally and politically damaging.

Discussion

Morales has continually positioned Russia as an economic ally, a defender of a multilateral world, and a source of political and economic support. However, his rhetoric addressing China has frequently been characterized by omission of information and superficial pleasantries. This work has shown how Morales' rhetoric may be revealing of a process of threat assessment. An evaluation of Morales' scathing views of the current global hegemon— the United States— reveals the leader's preoccupation with the detrimental effects that result from the involvement of great powers in small nations. Morales' system of threat assessment may be extrapolated to his views regarding China's increasing power; he recognizes China as a power with hegemonic ambitions in both his remarks addressing COVID-19 and the issues emerging from continued economic competition between the United States and China. The Bolivian leader—who has been undeniably disdainful of the US-dominated global order and advocated for change—continues to be cognizant of the dangers that could result from the replacement of one empire with another. Morales' rhetoric is indicative of hesitation to bandwagon with China as, for nations such as

Bolivia, bandwagoning can be viewed as tantamount to a loss of sovereignty. Russia represents a hedge that allows Morales to maintain a balanced alliance system.

Morales' rhetoric has highlighted the ideological and pragmatic considerations behind his support of Russia. Morales has endeavored to find common ground between his nation and the Russian Federation. Particularly, he has emphasized the supposed threat posed by Western nations to Russian sovereignty and Russia's resistance in reclaiming territory that has succumbed to Western encroachment. Concrete outcomes reflect Morales' rhetorical allyship; the actions taken by the Bolivian state are concurrent with Morales' rhetorical approach and include providing support for Russia in UN votes both during and subsequent to Morales' tenure and ongoing commitment to economic and political deals. These expanded economic ties and development links to the Federation reflect Morales' rhetoric of "fraternal nations." Bolivia and Russia are united in the mutual benefits provided by such an alliance. Russia profits in the manifestation of its pivot to Latin America and Bolivia benefits from allyship with a nation that has a long-term prospectus for economic and development agendas and a policy of resistance against Western encroachment that supports the development of a multipolar system.

Additionally, Morales' rhetoric indicates the pragmatic advantages of Bolivia's alliance with Russia. From vaccine innovations to nuclear power development projects, Morales regards Russia as a committed ally and one that will expand its undertakings in the future. Morales has highlighted the numerous strategic partnership agreements signed between the two nations and continued economic involvement may be a practical result of Morales' rhetorical support that aligns Bolivia's long-term development and economic trajectory with Russian interests,

particularly with regard to nuclear power research and lithium extraction projects. Additionally, Morales likely recognizes the select benefits he can personally incur from a friendly relationship with Russia—including job offers from Russian-affiliated media and perks such as, conceivably, the influencing of election results. In contrast, his high-profile scandal involving Chinese enterprises and a lack of equivalent support from Beijing may have enhanced Morales' view that rhetorical support of China has the potential to be personally and politically damaging. Ultimately, Morales' rhetoric that develops ties between Bolivia and Russia reflects not only a short-term tactical choice but also one rooted in long-term strategic interests. Morales' alignment preferences provide Bolivia with a strong ally in a changing global order and Russia with a supportive voice in Latin America.

Morales' support for Russia, however, does certainly not preclude alignment with China. In fact, despite the scandals, debt, and development issues plaguing a Bolivia-China alliance, Morales has visited China, congratulated China on its national day, shared smiles and handshakes with Xi Jinping, and highlighted China's pro-multipolarity foreign policy. This work has asked what aspects of Morales' support for Russia set it apart from his rhetoric addressing China. However, given that Morales is both unwilling and unlikely to condemn China, analysis of subtle rhetorical factors—including strategic omission, historical concern regarding the influence of hegemonic powers in the political and economic dealings of small nations, and a history of personal and political scandals that create a hostile domestic environment for pro-China support—have contributed to the assertion that Evo Morales' rhetoric towards China comes from a fundamentally different perspective than his approach to Russia. Contextualization of Morales'

expressions towards Russia and China in a broader context will provide support for the conclusions drawn by this work.

First, a quantitative perspective of Morales' rhetoric addressing Russia and China is supportive of this work's qualitative assertions. For instance, on Twitter, Morales mentions Russia more frequently than China—with China totaling 127 individual mentions and Russia 153 individual mentions. Morales has mentioned Russia on Twitter 12.68% more than China between 2016 and 2023, indicating his preference for emphasizing Russia. Furthermore, this difference is indicative of reticence in discussing China on his social media platforms. It is noteworthy that Morales' affirmative references to Russia outpace those of China, particularly given the controversial nature of supporting Russia in a context of global repudiation for its actions in Ukraine. While some may argue that this difference reflects the more "newsworthy" aspects of Russia's recent endeavors, China has had no shortage of noteworthy events (including controversies in the South China Sea and opposition to the 2019-2020 Hong Kong democracy protests) that have not resulted in an equivalent level of mentions from Morales.

Morales' difference in the use of friendly terms when discussing Russia and China is also indicative that supportive rhetoric does not always preclude an equal degree of alignment. For instance, Morales has referred to both Chinese president Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin as "hermano" or "brother." Analysis of the occurrences of the times each leader is called "brother" results in a 2.4:1 odds ratio in favor of Putin. Thus, it is more likely that Morales indicates fraternal alignment with the Russian leader. This preference may reflect shared values, interests, and a mutually supportive relationship. In contrast, Morales' characterizes his

relationship with Xi less frequently through a fraternal lens, implying less alignment. The use of appellations, however, may be a cultural factor beyond the scope of this work. However, these quantifiable aspects may be useful in evaluating how Morales' rhetoric is reflective of his approach toward Russia and China. Even as Morales hedges against alienating China by using rhetoric similar to how he addresses Russia, he still has produced a larger rhetorical corpus supportive of Russia. However, while a quantitative perspective aids in contextualizing the scope of Morales' Russia preference in his Twitter communiques, it is also an incomplete picture. Morales often alludes to events (e.g. referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a response to NATO without directly naming Russia) in a manner that is difficult to quantify; this limitation has contributed to the benefits emerging from a methodology centered on critical discourse analysis.

Second, Morales' approach toward alignment with Russia and China can be contextualized via a broader examination of Latin American states. Many nations have expressed enthusiasm for China's involvement in economic and development projects throughout the continent. Both Chinese and Latin American officials highlighted an overarching narrative of cooperation and China's role as a leader on the continent.¹¹⁹ Chinese President Xi's call for China to become more "lovable" on the world stage has resulted in centers for the study of the Chinese language and increased occurrences of high-level diplomatic meetings.¹²⁰ However, Russia's reception by Latin American nations has been decidedly lukewarm. Even as Russia has made a concentrated effort to extend overtures to Latin American states, the range of responses from the nations

¹¹⁹ Parsifal D'Sola. 2022. "Latin America Understands China." George W. Bush Presidential Center. October 31, 2022. <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/latin-america-understands-china/>.

¹²⁰ R. Evan Ellis. 2023. "China's Use of Soft Power in Support of Its Strategic Engagement in Latin America." R. Evan Ellis, Phd. December 13, 2023. <https://revanellis.com/chinas-use-of-soft-power-in-support-of-its-strategic-engagement-in-latin-america.html>.

themselves has varied, distinguishing Morales' unique position. In general, Latin American states fall into two distinct camps of engagement with Russia. First, authoritarian states that benefit from Russia's support but which do not establish how non-authoritarian nations engage with Russia. Russia's strongest allies in the region—Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela—do not exactly constitute allies with the strongest of democratic ideals, leading to the broad perception that Russia is willing to support authoritarian regimes. This assertion has been supported by Russia's massive arms sales to the Venezuelan government.¹²¹ Certainly, the leaders of these states are supportive of Russia. For instance, Venezuelan president Maduro claims sanctions against Russia are “madness.”¹²² However, even as Morales seeks to return to power and likely hopes that his support of Russia will result in political benefits, maintaining at least the semblance of a democratic system remains a point of pride and legitimacy for the Bolivian leader, meaning that including Bolivia with the group of authoritarian nations supportive of Russia could be considered a misclassification. Furthermore, Morales' approach toward Russia derives from a comparatively solid foundation due to Bolivia's mineral wealth and relative political stability. In contrast, nations like Cuba and Venezuela approach Russia from a less stable negotiation position given their respective economic and political milieus. Put bluntly, these states are likely to take what alliances they are offered and will express support for any effort of engagement on Russia's part as they otherwise may lack key strategic partnerships. In contrast, Bolivia, with a quasi-stable democratic political system, one of the world's largest lithium reserves, and trade relations with nations such as Brazil, Argentina, the United States, South Korea, and Japan, has the ability to choose its allies more strategically.

¹²¹ Szente-Varga, Mónica. 2022. “The Footprints of the Bear. Why Does the Return of Russia to Latin America Matter?” 51 (1): 32–44. <https://doi.org/10.16993/iberoamericana.549>.

¹²² Tarasenko, Pavel. n.d. “From Friend to Competitor: How Russia's War Has Strengthened Venezuela's Hand.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed December 15, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88604>.

Outside of these authoritarian outliers, the approach of most Latin American nations toward Russia can be best classified by, at best, ambivalence and, at worst, condemnation. Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the few existing inroads made by Russia have largely dissipated. Revealing of the extent of the condemnation faced by Russia, a 2023 joint declaration between the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States expressing concern about the "ongoing war" garnered signatures from 59 of 60 member states.¹²³ A 2022 UN General Assembly vote removing Russia from the U.N Human Rights Council yielded similar results, with 20 Latin American states approving the measure, nine abstaining, and only three voting against it. Bolivia, Cuba, and Nicaragua comprised the only nay votes.¹²⁴

Several nations have unequivocally condemned Russian actions.¹²⁵ For instance, prominent Argentine leaders, including former president Mauricio Macri, have called for Argentina to apply sanctions against Russia.¹²⁶ Argentine leaders' statements also reveal how other Latin American nations perceive Russia as a threat. For instance, following the announcement that Russia would withdraw its participation in bilateral nuclear disarmament with the United States, President Alberto Fernández's government acknowledged that such actions "further increase the danger of a new escalation."¹²⁷ Chilean president Gabriel Boric has also condemned Russia and sought to

¹²³ Christopher Stewart. 2023. "Chile Stands with Ukraine During EU-Latin American Summit." Kyiv Post. July 19, 2023. <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/19613>.

¹²⁴ Victor Mijares. 2022. "The War in Ukraine and Latin America: Reluctant Support." GIGA Focus Latin America. 2022.

<https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/the-war-in-ukraine-and-latin-america-reluctant-support>.

¹²⁵ "Back and Forth: Argentina's Changing Rhetoric on Russia's War in Ukraine | Buenos Aires Times." 2023. Buenos Aires Times. February 23, 2023.

<https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/back-and-forth-argentinas-changing-rhetoric-on-russias-war-in-ukraine>.
phtml.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

provide greater support to Ukraine.¹²⁸ President Lula of Brazil has taken a more measured stance¹²⁹, but has still positioned himself as a broker for peace between Russia and Ukraine and recently refused to promise that Putin would not be arrested if he attended the 2024 G-20 summit that will be held in Brazil.¹³⁰ Ultimately, Morales' rhetoric is distinctive from the rest of Latin American states and leaders. Since the beginning of 2022, his support for Russia has only intensified and shows no sign of dimming. Ultimately, the Bolivian leader seems to continue to forge strategic alliances between Bolivia and the Kremlin as he pitches Russia as an important economic partner and a political ally. Morales additionally uses his pro-Russia rhetorical strategies as a hedge against China's influence. Bolivia's historically unsuccessful interactions with Chinese economic and developmental initiatives, Morales' personal scandals involving Chinese entities, and Morales' long-standing apprehensions regarding the influence of hegemonic powers on smaller nations all factor into his pro-Russia rhetorical approach.

However, this work is not without limitations. First, the generalizability of these findings may be inhibited by the relatively subjective interpretation of Morales' rhetoric, even as secondary sources have been integrated in order to provide supporting evidence. Secondly, since Morales' tweets and interviews addressing Russia and China are not all applicable to this study, there may be potential biases which arise from the manual selection of data. Consequently, a cautious approach should be taken to the interpretation of the results. Additionally, Bolivia's constantly changing domestic political landscape may alter Morales' future rhetorical and political

¹²⁸ Berti, Lucas. 2023. "Boric Gets Latin America to Support Ukraine." The Brazilian Report. July 18, 2023. <https://brazilian.report/liveblog/latam/2023/07/18/boric-latin-america-support-ukraine/>.

¹²⁹ Lula's ambivalence in his approach to Russia may also stem from the domestic context following the hard-fought 2022 presidential election—many Brazilian right-wingers support Putin.

¹³⁰ Verma, Nidhi, and Nidhi Verma. 2023. "Lula Rows Back from Comments That Brazil Would Not Arrest Putin." Reuters, September 11, 2023, sec. World. <https://www.reuters.com/world/up-brazils-judiciary-decide-putin-arrest-if-he-visits-brazil-lula-2023-09-11/>.

approach. Even as Morales has shown unwavering support for Russia since his initial election in 2005 and the establishment of his social media presence in 2016, the upcoming 2025 presidential election introduces an element of uncertainty as to whether his approach will remain consistent . While his candidacy and the domestic Bolivian context certainly has the potential to reshape his political views, this work has maintained that such a change would be highly unlikely given that Morales has continued to support Russia over an almost 20-year time frame. Finally, the broader geopolitical context may shape Morales' preference for and orientation towards Russia. However, Morales' support has only intensified following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, setting him apart from other Latin American nations that have distanced themselves from the Kremlin. This suggests that a change in Morales' stance is relatively unlikely.

To enrich this discourse analysis and draw more nuanced conclusions, future research could benefit from a comparative approach that places Morales' rhetoric in conversation with that of other Latin American leaders. Examining the rhetorical strategies of leaders hailing from countries such as Venezuela and Cuba (both of which have close ties with Russia) could provide valuable insights into the broader regional approach of alliance-building strategies with great powers.

Conclusion

The political, economic, and ideological considerations behind Morales' rhetoric addressing Russia and China reveal that the Bolivian leader's discourse reflects a preference for alignment with Russia. Morales' rhetorical approach likely stems from an acute awareness of the dangers that nations with hegemonic ambitions can pose to small states such as Bolivia. This

approach—likely informed by the long history of interventionist actions taken against small nations by the United States and NATO— may be extrapolated to Morales’ thought processes in how he chooses to express alignment with rising powers. Morales is cognizant both of Bolivia’s disadvantageous position should there be a conflict between great powers and the potential for Bolivia to lose autonomy by bandwagoning with a rising China. Strengthening ties with Russia serves as a hedge that could aid in precluding such a scenario and, resultingly, influences Morales’ depictions of Russia as a particularly valuable economic and political partner.

Complementary to the geopolitical considerations of Morales’ rhetorical preference for Russia, supporting evidence reveals that Morales’ show of support for the Kremlin may result in personal gains for the Bolivian leader. Official Russian statements mirrored Morales’ narrative of a “coup” during the contested 2019 presidential elections; thus, he may regard the backing provided by Russian as an important factor in his bid to regain the presidency in the 2025 Bolivian presidential election. Additionally, allegations by Proekt— which suggest that Russian consultants assisted in behind-the-scenes manipulation during the 2019 presidential elections—may reinforce that Morales sees under-the-radar Russian expertise in media and electoral strategies as instrumental for his 2025 campaign’s success. In contrast, China has not offered Morales equivalent support. On the contrary, the 2016 scandal implicating the Bolivian leader in accusations of influence-peddling with Chinese companies has seemingly contributed to Morales’ defensive position. The memory of this scandal’s fallout may result in Morales being wary of the domestic implications that could result from excessive shows of support of Chinese involvement in Bolivia, particularly as he seeks to re-enter the political arena in the 2025 elections. Morales’ rhetoric is ultimately indicative of hedging between Russia and China. As

leader of a small nation vulnerable to shifting political and economic headwinds, Morales seeks to avoid any direct rhetorical confrontation with China in consideration of its status as an emerging superpower. However, Morales' rhetorical engagement with China and Russia reveal a consistent pattern: he has developed a rhetorical style categorized as equivocally pro-Russian alignment. Morales expresses a clear interest in forming an alliance with Russia while continuing to maintain selective engagement with China.

Evo Morales has long embraced his position and reputation as an anti-establishment leader, particularly when contending with an often-fraught unipolar system. China is eager to present itself as an alternative to the prevailing American-led world order, especially through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that explicitly aim to forge alliances with nations throughout the Global South. Many prominent Latin American leaders have favored drawing closer ties with China. In contrast, alignment with Russia offers relatively few economic or political benefits for Latin America states and, since 2022, Russian actions in Ukraine have sparked broad concern throughout the region. However, the hesitancy of leaders like Morales to wholeheartedly embrace the Chinese economic and political model could pose challenges for China's ascendancy as a global power. On the Russian side of the equation, Morales' rhetoric serves as an indicator that nations outside of Russia's near-abroad may still perceive the Kremlin as a key ally. Ultimately, Morales' rhetoric indicates that when leaders from countries like Bolivia are cognizant of the potential threat posed by rising superpowers, they may be more receptive to expanding alliances with other "fraternal nations."

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