



The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center

Latin America as an Arena for Iran and Hezbollah's Terrorist, Subversive and Criminal Activities¹



Ahmadinejad visits Venezuela in January 2012, seen here with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (Photo from the almanar.com.lb website)

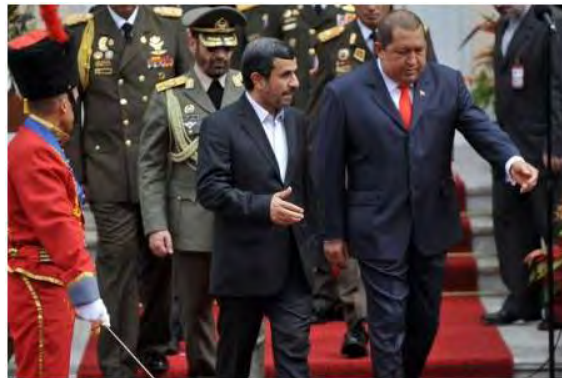
¹Follow-up of the ITIC April 19, 2009 study "Iran increases its political and economic presence in Latin America, defying the United States and attempting to undermine American hegemony" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e006.pdf.

Overview

Background Information

1. Since Ahmadinejad was elected president in August 2005, Iran has extended and solidified its relations with several Latin American countries, **especially Venezuela and Bolivia**, and **increased its efforts** to obtain a political foothold in the others. According to findings brought before the American Senate Foreign Relations Committee, **Iran has significantly increased** its diplomatic representation in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Argentina and Brazil. It was also reported that **since 2005 Iran has increased the number of its embassies in Latin America from five to 11 and set up 17 "cultural centers."**²

2. The common factors in the increasingly close relations between Iran and certain Latin American countries are their **anti-American ideologies and policies, and their desire to present a revolutionary alternative to what they perceive as American imperialism**. Iran (also employing Hezbollah) exploits the relations to strengthen its foothold in Latin America to establish a presence and gain political, economic, cultural and religious influence. As in other areas of the world, in Latin America **Iran employs terrorism and subversion, and works to instill radical Shi'ite Islamic ideology into the local Muslim communities**.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Iranian President Ahmadinejad meet in Caracas (Press TV, January 9, 2012)

3. Iran's increased activity in Latin America is **part of its global strategy**, whose objectives go far beyond the desire for hegemony in the Middle East. Iran, regarding itself as hemmed in by the United States and its allies, stubbornly pursues the nuclear crisis with the West and **seeks to present the United States with a revolutionary challenge in its own backyard by exploiting its relative advantages with countries and populaces in Latin American**: Iran's anti-American ideology and rhetoric, which fall on receptive ears; Iranian petrodollars, which can be used for political and propaganda purposes; and a large Muslim population, some of it Lebanese, living in key Latin American countries.

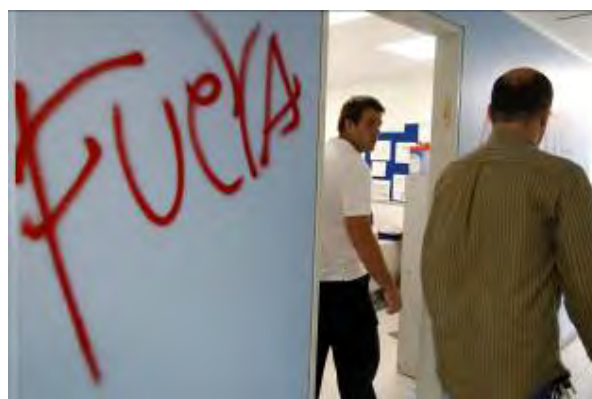
²According to Ambassador Roger F. Noriega before the US Senate, February 16, 2012. See below.

4. **Iran's interests and objectives** in Latin America are the following:

1) **Politics and strategy:** Iran has found **ideological and political sympathy** in a number of Latin American countries, which **may enable it to escape from its increasing political isolation and strengthen the so-called "resistance camp" it leads** (including Syria, Hezbollah, and Palestinian terrorist organizations). Iran also regards Latin America as a good area **for defiance and for challenging** the United States through increased **political and military collaboration, economic infiltration** and extensive activities to **disseminate Shi'ite Islam and eventually export the Islamic Revolution** to Latin America.

2) **Economics:** Iran focuses on economic relations with Latin American countries in **energy and oil**, and strives to increase those relations to **help it circumvent the sanctions which have been imposed on it**. Thus Iran's relations with Venezuela enable it to **coordinate prices** with a large oil exporter like itself (Iran and Venezuela are respectively the fourth and fifth largest oil exporters in the world). In addition, Iran wants to **exploit uranium deposits in Venezuela and other Latin American countries** (in 2009 Venezuela publicly stated that Iran was helping it explore for uranium.) However, Iranian-Latin American economic collaboration is still limited and a relatively small factor in Iran's overall trade.

3) **Harming Israel's political relations with Latin America countries:** One example was the terminating of Israeli-Venezuelan and Israeli-Bolivian relations during Operation Cast Lead. In addition, Iran's close relations with Venezuela and other countries create an internal political atmosphere and even infrastructure (encouraged by Iranian propaganda) to **harm the Jewish communities in those countries** (where, as in other parts of the world, often no distinction is made between anti-Israel policy and harming Jewish communities).



"Get out," graffiti on the wall of a synagogue in Caracas, Venezuela's capital (Photo by Carlos Garcia Rawlins for Reuters, January 31, 2009).

4) **Constructing secret intelligence and terrorist networks:** Those networks give Iran operational-terrorist options, using the Quds Force and other bodies, to launch **terrorist activities against Israel and the United States, both routinely and as the order of the day**. Iran exploits the subversive and terrorist capabilities of **Hezbollah**, which conducts

extensive activity in Latin America and has increased its presence there while **engaging in drug-trafficking and other crimes**.

Limitations of Iran's Political Power in Latin America

5. **Ahmadinejad's last visit to Venezuela** (January 9, 2012) **and other Latin American countries** (Nicaragua, Cuba and Ecuador) illustrated **that regardless of Iranian aspirations in Latin America there were limitations to its political power**. His visit was prompted by the increasing tension between Tehran and the West and Iran's growing international isolation. One of his objectives in visiting Latin America was to demonstrate Tehran's ability to advance its relations with countries beyond the borders of the Middle East and in a region considered America's backyard, and **show it could defy, and perhaps even threaten, the United States**. However, in reality, Ahmadinejad and the Latin American countries did not sign new agreements, and his visit was accompanied by **broad criticism from local media for Iran's not having honored previous economic commitments**.

6. **The considerable efforts made by Iran to strengthen its ties with other important Latin American countries**, beyond those where it has already gained a foothold thanks to its relations with Venezuela, **were unsuccessful**. For example, Iran's relations with **Argentina**, virtually destroyed after the two terrorist attacks on the Israeli embassy and the AMIA Jewish community center in the early 1990s, have never been repaired (the attacks are still a cause of tension in the Argentinean arena). In May 2011, **Bolivia** forced Vahidi, Iran's minister of defense, to cut short a state visit following political pressure from Argentina. **Brazil** has distanced itself from Iran since Dilma Rousseff was elected president, and Iran's relations with **Colombia** and **Mexico** are strained (both of which accuse Iran of promoting drug-trafficking and terrorism within their borders). In addition, Iran's broad activity in Latin America has **so far not significantly damaged Israeli-Latin American relations** (with the exception of Venezuela).

Iranian-Venezuelan Relations

7. **Since Ahmadinejad was elected president in August 2005, Iran had strengthened its relations with revolutionary Latin American countries which defy the United States** and object to its regional influence. **Ahmadinejad's vision**, ambitious as it is, to lead the world camp opposing American hegemony and create a new (Islamic) world order, and his determination to export the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, found **a willing disciple in the form of Hugo Chávez**, Venezuela's president. Iranian strategy was also integrated into political, societal and economic changes both in Venezuela and in other countries. **Chávez**, whose policies are defiantly anti-American, **succeeded in marketing Iran to other Latin American countries**, among them **Nicaragua, Ecuador and Cuba**.

8. In recent years **political and economic cooperation** between **Venezuela and Iran** has increased significantly. They signed many agreements regarding their economies, banks, oil and

natural gas. **Military relations** were strengthened after a military delegation headed by Iran's minister of defense, Mostafa Muhammad Najjar visited Caracas (April 30, 2009). The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding intended to **strengthen joint military collaboration**.

9. Political and economic collaboration between the two countries were manifested in two specific fields:

1) **Exploring for and mining uranium: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** issued a report in December 2008 on possible Iranian-Venezuelan collaboration in **mining Venezuelan uranium**. According to the report, Venezuela is estimated to have 50,000 tons of unmined uranium and might mine it for Iran.³ According to an article in The Guardian, Iran was helping Venezuela look for uranium using geophysical flights and geochemical deposit analysis. The article stated that uranium had been found in western Venezuela and the southeastern Bolivar state.⁴

2) **Banking and financial services:** In 2009 it was reported that Iranians had opened an international development bank in Venezuela called the Banco Internacional de Desarrollo. It is an independent subsidiary of **Iran's Export Development Bank**. **In 2008 the United States Treasury Department imposed sanctions on both banks** for having provided or attempted to provide financial services to the Iranian ministry of defense and Armed Force Logistics, both Iranian entities which promote Iran's nuclear program.⁵

10. Ambassador Roger Noriega, formerly a diplomat with the American State Department and today a fellow of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), said in testimony before the American Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 2012 that **Iran had provided Venezuela with weapons systems**. He said the systems gave Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's president, unprecedented **capabilities to threaten Venezuela's neighbors, and indirectly to threaten the United States**⁶ (See below for further details about Noriega's testimony).

The Iranian Battle for Hearts and Minds

11. **Several million Arabs and Muslims live in Latin America, most of them Sunnis** (with a Lebanese Shi'ite minority), and are the principle target of Iran's propaganda activities. There are two main communities: **one** whose roots are in India, Indonesia and Pakistan, and the **other**, made up mainly of Arabs from Syria and Lebanon, descendents of immigrants who moved to Latin America in

³<http://carnegieendowment.org/2008/12/18/venezuela-nuclear-profile/2xwc>

⁴<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/8725168>

⁵Online.wsj.com, September 8, 2009

⁶In November 2010 and May 2011 the German daily newspaper **Die Welt** reported that Venezuela and Iran had signed **an agreement for the joint operation of a missile base in Venezuela**. In response the American State Department said that it had not evidence to support Die Welt's report.

the 19th and 20th centuries. While the percentages of the Arab-Muslim populations in each country are not statistically significant, **their socio-economic status is relatively high.**

12. The **two largest Arab-Muslim communities in Latin America** are in **Brazil** and **Argentina**. There are about a million to a million and a half Muslims in **Brazil**, including about 10,000 Brazilians who converted to Islam (less than 1% of the entire population). About 700,000 Muslims live in **Argentina** (about 2% of the population), most of them descendents of immigrants from Syria and Lebanon.⁷ Large concentrations of Muslims can also be found in Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico and the Caribbean Islands.

13. **The Muslims spread throughout Latin America, especially Shi'ite Muslims originating in Lebanon, provide a convenient environment for Iran and Hezbollah for establishing subversive, terrorist and occasionally criminal networks. Iran also conducts extensive ideological, religious, cultural and social activities within the Muslim communities to disseminate Khomeini's radical Shi'ite Islam.** The activities are often interrelated (See below).

14. **Iran's intensive efforts to export the Islamic Revolution to Latin America take many forms: financing the construction of mosques and cultural and religious centers; translating books and ideological and religious material into Spanish and distributing them throughout Latin America; providing local residents with religious and political training in Iran (who then return to their own countries imbued with radical Islam and anti-American, anti-Israeli ideology); sending Iranian clerics to preach Khomeini's ideology in Latin America; and establishing a Spanish TV station which broadcasts 24/7 (HispanTV, which began broadcasting on February 1, 2012);⁸ and providing assistance in establishing Spanish-language Internet sites.**



HispanTV, Iran's Spanish-language TV station: "strengthening relations with Latin America is currently Iran's number one priority."

⁷Based on Lieutenant-Colonel Curtis C. Connell, [US Air Force] Air University, Cadre Paper No. 21, "Understanding Islam and Its Impact on Latin America," Air University Press, March 2005.

⁸**Mohammad Hosseini**, Iran's minister of culture and Islamic guidance, referred to the establishing of HispanTV as a **step meant to fill Iran's needs in Latin America. He said that "strengthening relations with Latin America is currently Iran's number one priority...Iran wants to increase its presence in that area of the world"** (ilna.ir website).

Subversion and Terrorism

15. In the overall Iranian view, **Latin America is a secondary arena**. Its principle venues for widespread subversion and terrorism are Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian arena, Central and Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf and Sudan. Nevertheless, **Iran and Hezbollah find Latin America attractive for purposes of terrorism, subversion and crime**. As elsewhere, **in Latin America their activities are led by the Quds Force in collaboration with various other bodies and entities within the Iranian regime**.

16. Iranian activity in Latin America, as in other arenas, combines exporting the Islamic Revolution with terrorism and crime, **worries Washington and is often represented as a threat – or at least a potential threat – to American interests**. However, specialists, officials in the administration and Congressmen who monitor Iranian and Hezbollah activity in Latin America sometimes **differ as to how serious they think the threat and its significance are**.

17. In our opinion, there is a **methodological difficulty** in assessing the nature and seriousness of the Iranian threat because it is not easy to distinguish between **Iran's vast subversive activities and those undertaken to export the Islamic Revolution, on the one hand, and its terrorist activities on the other**: On the one hand, **experience has taught that subversive and propaganda activity** (with the addition of criminal activity) **prepare the ground for a network of people who are liable, given the right circumstances, to participate in terrorist activity**. On the other, Iran's preoccupation with disseminating Shi'ite Islam and exporting the Islamic Revolution to Latin America **may not necessarily be translated only into terrorist activity, but has the potential to endanger other American interests in Latin America** (such as fostering hatred for the United States and the radicalization of the Latin American Muslim population).

18. On January 5, 2012, the American Congressional Research Service (CRS) issued a study called "Latin America: Terrorism Issues," written by Mark Sullivan, a specialist in Latin American affairs.⁹ It quoted the State Department's Country Report on Terrorism (published in August 2011), which stated that "There are no known operational cells of either Al-Qaeda or Hezbollah-related groups in the [western] hemisphere." However, according to the Report, **"ideological sympathizers in South America and the Caribbean continued to provide financial and moral support to these and other terrorist groups in the Middle East and South Asia."** (ITIC emphasis)

19. Other Latin American experts in the United States, however, **give greater importance to the threats to American interests, including the threat of terrorism, resulting from Iran and Hezbollah's extensive activities in Latin America**. One of them is **Ambassador Roger F. Noriega**, who testified many times before Congressional committees. Familiar with Latin American affairs, between 2003 and 2005 he was the American ambassador to the Organization of American

⁹<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RS21049.pdf>.

States and today is a fellow of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and one of a team of experts monitoring Iranian activity in Latin America.

20. On **February 16, 2012** a hearing was held by the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee to discuss **Iran's influence and activity in Latin America**. Ambassador Noriega presented the subcommittee with the results of his team's research, which dealt with **threats to the United States caused by Iranian activity in Latin America**. "Our exhaustive work," he said, "leads to the following conclusions:"¹⁰

- "Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chaves and Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are conspiring **to wage an asymmetrical struggle against U.S. security and to abet Iran's illicit nuclear program**. Their clandestine activities pose a clear and present danger to regional peace and security.
- Iran has provided Venezuela conventional **weapon systems capable of attacking the United States and** our allies in the region.
- Iran has used 30\$ billion in economic ventures in Venezuela as means to launder money and **evade international financial sanctions**.
- **Since 2005, Iran has found uranium in Venezuela, Ecuador and other countries** in the region and is conducting suspicious mining operations in some uranium-rich areas.
- **Two terrorist networks** one home-grown Venezuelan clan and another cultivated by Mohsen Rabbani, a notorious agent of the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, proselytize, fund-raise, recruit, and train operatives on behalf of Iran and Hezbollah in many countries in the Americas.
- **Hezbollah conspires with drug-trafficking networks** in South America as a means of raising resources and sharing tactics.
- The Venezuelan state-owned airline, Conviasa, operates regular service from Caracas to Damascus and Teheran - providing Iran, Hezbollah, and associated narco-traffickers a surreptitious **means to move personnel, weapons, contraband and other materiel**.

21. Iran's activities in Latin America and its **readiness to carry out terrorist attacks on American soil** (manifested by the attempted assassination in Washington of the Saudi Arabian ambassador) led Ambassador Noriega to the conclusion that "**Tehran's activities near our homeland constitute a very real threat that can no longer be ignored.**" (ITIC emphasis) Despite with the grave assessments of the Iranian threat as expressed in a number of expert testimonies before Congress, certain members of the American administration are of the opinion that Iran's influence in Latin America is limited and that the United States can minimize it.

¹⁰http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Roger_Noriega_Testimony1.pdf

Investigating How Iran and Hezbollah Operate in Latin America

22. The following study deals with Iranian and Hezbollah activities in Latin America in **three inter-related areas**:

- 1) **Section I – Terrorism:** Latin America as an arena for Iranian-Hezbollah terrorism
- 2) **Section II – Criminal activities:** Iranian and Hezbollah involvement in criminal activities which serve as a source of revenue and also serve their subversive and terrorist activities in Latin America.
- 3) **Section III – Subversion and exporting the Islamic Revolution:** Exporting radical Islam and Shi'a, and fostering hatred for the United States and its allies (including Israel) in Latin America as part of Iran's global strategy.

Section I: Latin America as an Arena for Iranian-Hezbollah terrorism

Overview

23. **Iran regards Latin America as an arena for terrorist activity**, which the Iranian regime considers an instrument for promoting its strategic objectives. The designated Iranian bodies active in those areas are the **Quds Force and the ministry of intelligence and security**. They support **Hezbollah and use it as Iran's most important proxy in its efforts to launch terrorist activities**. According to the American media, **in recent years the Quds Force extended its activities throughout Latin America, especially in Venezuela**.¹¹

24. In April 2010 a non-classified US Defense Department report was presented to Congress dealing with Iranian military strength. It stated that the **Quds Force** (which engages in terrorism and subversion around the world) **had increased its presence in Latin America, particularly in Venezuela**. At the end of 2011 former American intelligence officials told the Washington Post that the **presence of Quds Force officers and other military personnel in diplomatic missions** enhanced "Iran's ability to carry out covert activities, sometimes in conjunction with members of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group that operates extensive networks in Latin America and maintains ties with drug cartels."¹² However, the commander of the US Southern Command, General Douglas Frazer, said that Iranian activity in Latin America focused on diplomacy and commerce, adding that he had not seen a growth of Iran's military presence in the region.¹³

Evaluation of Iranian-Hezbollah Terrorist Capabilities in Latin America

25. During the 1990s both **Iran and Hezbollah demonstrated formidable capabilities to carry out showcase terrorist attacks against Jewish targets**. In 1992 they used a car bomb driven by a suicide bomber to attack the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 civilians. Two years later they used the same method to blow up the Jewish community center (the AMIA building) in Buenos Aires, killing 85. Since then, Iran and Hezbollah have not carried out terrorist attacks in Latin America against Israeli targets, and almost none against the United States (in several instances, local criminal and terrorist networks have been involved in planning terrorist attacks on American soil, which, however, were prevented.) In our assessment, since the two attacks in Argentina, Iran and Hezbollah have focused on **constructing covert terrorist networks** in Latin America which **will be activated when the Iranian regime considers it appropriate**.

¹¹Google.com/hostednews/afp/article; Washingtonpost.com; also see the April 2, 2007 ITIC bulletin "Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the main tool to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran" <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/site/html/search.asp?sid=13&pid=108&numResults=37&isSearch=yes&isT8=yes>.

¹²http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-seeking-to-expand-influence-in-latin-america/2011/12/30/gIQArfpcUP_story_1.html

¹³CRS report, January 2012

26. In our assessment, **the Iranian terrorist-subversive infrastructure has several layers**: one is the **Iranian embassies**, where in our assessment Quds Force and Iranian intelligence operatives are stationed and can execute terrorist attacks if such a decision is made;¹⁴ another is **the Arab-Muslim communities**, some of them Shi'ite, **which are exposed to Iranian attempts to export the Islamic Revolution**. They may serve as a reservoir from which collaborators can be recruited as agents to collect intelligence, prepare the logistics for and participate in a terrorist attack. Another layer is **Iran's involvement in crime**, which might be turned to terrorism (for example, the attempted assassination of the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States). **Iranian and Hezbollah terrorist operatives are sent from Iran and Lebanon to engage local collaborators in countries where terrorist attacks have been planned.**

27. As for **Hezbollah**, in our assessment it **has its own covert networks in Latin America**, routinely used to raise the funds necessary for Hezbollah's activities in Lebanon (to supplement funds received from Iran) and to maintain the routine activities of its various terrorist networks (which will be put into operation when Iran and Hezbollah decide the time is right). **Criminal activities are an important source of revenue for Hezbollah, carried out in conjunction with local drug cartels and other criminal organizations.** Hezbollah has close relations with the drug cartels in Mexico and Colombia and its presence is prominent in the free trade zones in Latin America (such as the triple frontier, where Brazil shares a border with Argentina and Paraguay, and Venezuela's Margarita Island.)

Venezuela as an Arena for Terrorism

Overview

28. **In our assessment, Iran and Hezbollah maintain cells in Venezuela which are potentially capable of carrying out terrorist activities.** The close political and economic relations between Iran and Venezuela, and the regular Caracas-Tehran-Damascus airline flights, **make it easy for Iran and Hezbollah to carry out terrorist activities – often combined with crime – in Venezuela.** In all probability the activities are spearheaded by the **Quds Force**, with the support of **Hezbollah and other Iranian bodies.** In addition, **Venezuela serves as a platform for Iran and Hezbollah's terrorist activities in other Latin American countries.**

29. American experts dealing with Latin America are **divided** on the issue of Hezbollah's operative capabilities in Latin America in general and in Venezuela in particular. While the State Department claims that Hezbollah does not have operational terrorist cells in Latin America (the CRS Report), in February 2012 Ambassador Roger Noriega told a Senate subcommittee that at least two Iranian-

¹⁴On October 26, 2011, Dr. Matthew Levitt testified before a joint hearing of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management regarding Iranian terrorist activities on American soil. He said that testifying before Congress in the weeks following the attack on the AMIA building in 1994, "the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism expressed concern that Iranian embassies in the region were stacked with larger than necessary numbers of diplomats, some of whom were believed to be intelligence agents and terrorist operatives" (<http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Levitt.pdf>)

Hezbollah terrorist networks were active in Latin America: **one, he said, was in Venezuela and included local supporters of Iran and Hezbollah, and the other was operated by the Quds Force.** Those networks, he said, had **at least 80 operatives** and were active in at least 12 Latin American countries, especially **Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and Chile.**

The Ghazi Nasreddin Network

30. **In Venezuela Ghazi Nasreddin (aka Abu Ali) heads a local network affiliated with Hezbollah and composed of local collaborators.**¹⁵ Ghazi Nasreddin is a **Lebanese Shi'ite Muslim** who became a Venezuelan citizen 11 years ago. He is a diplomat in Venezuela's foreign service and is the second most important person in the Venezuelan embassy in Syria.¹⁶ He was (and may possibly still be) president of the **Shi'ite Islamic center in Caracas.** He has exploited his diplomatic status to transfer funds to Hezbollah and to transport Hezbollah operatives to and from Venezuela.¹⁷

31. On June 18, 2008, the US Treasury Department said in an announcement that it was freezing the American assets of two Venezuelan residents, **Ghazi Nasreddin and Fauzi Knaan "for providing financial and other support to Hezbollah."** (ITIC emphasis) In addition, American citizens were banned from entering into commercial relations with either of them. According to the Treasury report, Ghazi Nasreddin had spoken to potential donors about contributing to Hezbollah and provided them with account numbers for depositing funds which would reach Hezbollah directly.¹⁸ A 2010 Treasury Department report on international terrorism **also voiced concern over Hezbollah's fund-raising activities in Latin America.**¹⁹

32. **Ambassador Roger Noriega told the Senate subcommittee that Ghazi Nasreddin was one of Hezbollah's most important assets.** That was because of his diplomatic status in Damascus and his close relations with Hugo Chávez and Tarek el-Aissami, Venezuelan minister of the interior. According to Ambassador Noriega, Ghazi Nasreddin's brother, **Abdallah Nasreddin,** a former member of the Venezuelan Congress, was **connected to his brother's network.** He exploits his position as president of the Venezuelan branch of the Latin American Islamic-Arab federation to

¹⁵For further information see the April 19, 2009 bulletin "Iran increases its political and economic presence in Latin America, defying the United States and attempting to undermine American hegemony. It also foments radical Shi'ite Islamization and exports Iran's revolutionary ideology, using Hezbollah to establish intelligence, terrorism and crime networks, liable to be exploited against the United States and Israel" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e006.pdf.

¹⁶Ambassador Roger Noriega, Commentary, February 2012.

¹⁷The ITIC April 19, 2009 bulletin.

¹⁸Treasury.gov website

¹⁹CRS Report

maintain contacts with Muslim communities in other Latin American countries.²⁰ Today he is reportedly **a money-launderer and in collaboration with Hezbollah manages commercial enterprises in Latin America**. According to Ambassador Noriega, his younger brother, **Uday Nasreddin**,²¹ is **responsible for establishing paramilitary training centers on the Venezuelan island of Margarita**. He recruits Venezuelan civilians through local committees of Hugo Chávez's radical supporters ("Circulos Bolivarianos") and **sends them to Iran for follow-up training**.

Exploiting the Caracas-Damascus-Tehran Route for Operational Purposes

33. Since 2007 there have been regular **weekly Iranair and Conviasa [Venezuela] flights between Iran and Venezuela**, although they have become less frequent since 2010.²² In recent years the American State Department expressed concern, and in its annual report on international terrorism said that the flights were only superficially inspected by the Venezuelan immigration and customs services.

34. **Various reports have stated that the flights were not conducted like ordinary commercial flights**. For example, some of the passengers from Tehran were separated from the others at the Caracas airport and **entered the country without being subjected to the customary procedures**. On the other hand, ordinary passengers and their documents were subjected to close scrutiny by both the Iranian and Venezuelan governments²³

35. **The following are two concrete examples of the operational use terrorist operatives have made of Iranair and Conviasa:**

1) In 2011, **Mohsen Rabbani**, a prominent Iranian who combines subversion and terrorist activities in Latin America (See below), arrived in Venezuela under an assumed name on a flight from Tehran. From there he continued to Brazil, a focal point for his activities (See below). According to newspaper articles on his arrival in Brazil, intelligence agents (probably Brazilian) call the flights from Tehran to Caracas "**Aeroterror**," because they are used by suspected terrorists to fly to Latin America.²⁴

2) **In 2007 an attempted terrorist attack carried out by a terrorist cell from Trinidad was prevented at Kennedy Airport**. According to an announcement from the United States Attorney General, the terrorists were in contact with Iranians, and one of the names mentioned was **Mohsen Rabbani**. Three of the terrorist were detained in Trinidad in June 2007, and one,

²⁰According to Ambassador Noriega, Abdallah Nasreddin is president of an Islamic network called the Federation of Arab and American Entities in Latin America. It was established in 1972 to unite Muslims in Latin America, principally those of Lebanese and Syrian origin. According to Ambassador Noriega, **the Federation supports anti-American regimes in the Middle East and Latin America, and is also oriented against Israel** .

²¹Named for one of Saddam Hussein's sons.

²²CRS Report

²³Fox News, September 14, 2010

²⁴Anna Mahjar-Barducci on the activities of Mohsen Rabbani, quoted by the Freerepublic.com website, June 24, 2011

Abd al-Qader, who had been instructed to contact the Iranians, **was detained on board a plane bound for Venezuela, from where he planned to fly to Iran.**

Margarita Island as a Venue for Criminal and Terrorist Activity

36. Margarita Island, off the coast of Venezuela, has been mentioned in recent years as a **focal point of criminal and terrorist activity involving Hezbollah.** It is a small but well-populated island, home to about 400,000 people. **About 4,000 of them are Arab immigrants, most of them of Syrian and Lebanese origin,** with cultural links to their mother countries (it has been reported that the local cable networks broadcast Al-Jazeera TV and Lebanese and Syrian channels). Despite their small number, they have **economic influence,** are involved in trade and own travel agencies and banks.

37. Venezuela declared Margarita Island a **free trade zone,** facilitating the **extensive criminal activity** taking place there. **Hezbollah,** well-entrenched within the local Lebanese-Syrian population, participates in the criminal activity. There have been many reports of **drug dealing, money laundering, collecting donations for terrorist organizations and document forging** (including of passports, IDs and letters of passage for terrorist operatives). Some of that activity, including drug-smuggling, is directed against the United States.



Margarita Island, off the coast of Venezuela

38. Testifying before the Senate on February 16, 2012, Ambassador Noriega said that in recent years security personnel trusted by Hugo Chávez had **provided Hezbollah with material aid.** Testifying before a House subcommittee in July 2011, he said **Margarita Island had become a safe haven and center of Hezbollah operations in the Americas,** and that their activity on Margarita Island had eclipsed the area known as the triple frontier between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (See below). He said that in the spring of 2010 **two Hezbollah operatives managed training for terrorists who had been brought in from other countries in the region.**²⁵

²⁵Ambassador Roger Noriega, "Hizbollah in Latin America, Implications for US Homeland Security," July 7, 2011, testimony before the US House of Representative Subcommittee of Counterterrorism and Intelligence Committee for Homeland Security

Argentina as an Arena for Terrorism

Overview

39. The two most horrific terrorist attacks carried out by Iran and Hezbollah in Latin America were the **showcase suicide bombing attacks of the first half of the 1990s. They were orchestrated by Iran** and supported by a **sleeper cell**, part of the terrorist infrastructure constructed by Iran and Hezbollah in Argentina, one of many in Latin America. The presence of the infrastructure enabled them to organize and carry out two large, particularly deadly suicide bombing attacks in a relatively short time and with considerable fanfare and "success" from Iran and Hezbollah's viewpoint. From Iran's point of view, the attack was carried out at the acceptable cost of complicating Iran's relations with Argentina and reinforcing Iran's international reputation as a terrorism-exporting country.

The Car Bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, 1992

40. In the early afternoon of March 17, 1992, **a pickup truck driven by a suicide bomber and packed with explosives** rammed through the gate of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and detonated. **Twenty-nine Israelis and Argentineans were killed and more than 220 were wounded**, among them members of the Israeli diplomatic staff. **Hezbollah**, using the pseudonym "Islamic jihad," claimed responsibility for the attack, **professing it to be in revenge for the IDF killing of Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abbas Musawi** the previous month (February 16, 1992).

41. In May 1999 the Argentinean supreme court concluded its investigation, and **having determined that Hezbollah was responsible for the attack, issued a warrant for the arrest of Imad Mughniyeh**, commander of Hezbollah's military-terrorist apparatuses (Mughniyeh died in Damascus in 2008). An investigation carried out by Israel, whose results were made public in 2003, showed that **the highest levels of the Iranian regime orchestrated the attack and authorized Hezbollah to carry it out**. Former Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told a press conference that it was clear to Israel that Hezbollah, using its external operational apparatus headed by operational commander Imad Mughniyeh, had been responsible for carrying out the attack.²⁶

²⁶Ynet.co.il website



The Israeli embassy building after the attack



The Israeli embassy building after the attack (Photo from the tags.walla.co.il website)



Evacuating a wounded civilian



Near the Israeli embassy after the attack



The Argentinean press coverage of the attack

The Car Bombing of the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) Building in Buenos Aires, 1994

Overview

42. On July 18, 1994, at 9:53 in the morning, a powerful blast shook the Jewish community center (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people in and around the building and wounding more than 300.

43. The front of the building collapsed and nearby buildings were damaged as well. The investigation revealed that the explosion had been caused by a **suicide bomber** driving a Renault van packed with about **400 kilograms (880 pounds) of explosives**. It took several weeks to evacuate the bodies.



Pictures of the AMIA building after the attack. Left: Looking for victims. Right: The crater left by the explosion.

The Main Findings of the Argentinean Investigation

44. On October 25, 2006, Dr. Alberto Nisman, the Argentinean attorney general, and prosecutor Marcelo Martínez Burgos revealed the findings of the investigation, carried out by a specially-appointed team. The findings were issued in a report more than 800 pages long and the main points were reported at a press conference. According to the information given, **the investigation had unequivocally determined that the decision to bomb the AMIA building had been made by the leadership of the Iranian regime and that it had been carried out by Hezbollah, which served the Iranians as a proxy for implementing their policies.**

45. In light of the report, Judge Rodolfo Corral issued international arrest warrants for **seven high-ranking members of the Iranian regime** and one senior Hezbollah terrorist operative, all of whom had been involved in the terrorist attack. One of the seven, **some of whom still serve in high positions in the Iranian regime**, was **Ahmed Vahidi**, today Iran's defense minister and **Quds Force commander at the time of the attack** (1994). A warrant was not issued for the arrest of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, possibly for political reasons, even though the report explicitly stated that he had been party to the decision to carry out the attack.²⁷

²⁷**No such decision could possibly have been made without the complicity and authorization of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.** The report issued by Argentinean state intelligence (CIDE) in March 2003 places responsibility for the attack on Khamenei as well. However, Argentina's judicial system did not ask for an international warrant for his arrest, despite the fact that his name was mentioned in a 2006 report as one of the high-ranking Iranians who had been party to the decision to bomb the AMIA building.

46. The following are the seven members of the Iranian regime and the Hezbollah terrorist operative (as of October 2006) who were involved in the AMIA bombing and for whom international arrest warrants were issued:

- 1) **Ali Akbar Rafsanjani**, president of Iran
- 2) **Ali Fallahian**, minister of intelligence and security
- 3) **Ali Akbar Velayati**, foreign minister
- 4) **Mohsen Rezai**, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards
- 5) **Ahmad Vahidi**, commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force
- 6) **Mohsen Rabbani**, cultural attaché in the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires
- 7) **Ahmad Ashgari (aka Mohsen Reza Randjbaran)**, third secretary of the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires
- 8) **Imad Mughniyeh**, head of Hezbollah's foreign intelligence (**Note: Mughniyeh, who commanded Hezbollah's military-terrorist system, died in Damascus in 2008**).

The Seven High-Ranking Iranians and the Senior Hezbollah Operative with Outstanding International Arrest Warrants

CON PEDIDO DE CAPTURA

			
Ali Akbar Heshemi Bahramie Rafsanjani ■ Ex presidente de Irán	Ali Fallahijan ■ Ex ministro de Información y Seguridad	Ali Akbar Velayati ■ Ex ministro de Relaciones Exteriores	Mohser Rezai ■ Ex comandante de la Guardia Revolucionaria
			
Imad Favez Moughnieh ■ Jefe de Seguridad Exterior de Hezbollah	Mohser Rabbani ■ Ex consejero cultural de la embajada de Irán	Ashgari o Randjbaran ■ Ex tercer secretario de la embajada de Irán	Amad Vahidi ■ Ex comandante de las fuerzas QUDS

47. **On November 10, 2006, Argentina's attorney general asked to have international arrest warrants issued for the eight Iranians** on the grounds that they had committed "a crime against humanity." Two weeks later Argentina asked Interpol to issue the warrants. **Interpol's directorate**, having studied the evidence presented by Argentina and Iran, **decided to issue them**. However, Interpol did not issue warrants for the arrest of former Iranian president Ali Rafsanjani, former foreign minister Velayati or former Iranian ambassador to Argentina, Hadi Soleimanipour, who was included in the Argentinean request, in our assessment because of political considerations.

48. At the beginning of April 2012, **it was announced that former Argentinean president Carlos Menem would be tried for obstructing the investigation into the AMIA bombing**. At Menem's trial, the prosecution is expected to claim that at the time, **evidence of the participation of local Argentineans in the the attack had been suppressed**. Menem is accused of exerting pressure on Juan-José Galliano, the federal judge in charge of the AMIA case, to abandon inquiries into the possible involvement in the attack of a Syrian-Argentinean businessman named **Alberto Kanoore Edul** (Haaretz quoting Reuters, April 1, 2012)

Main Points of the Report²⁸

49. The report states that the decision to carry out the attack was made not by a small isolated group of extremely radical Islamic functionaries, but was rather a decision extensively discussed and **ultimately adopted by a consensus of the highest representatives of the Iranian government at the time. Its main points are the following (ITIC emphasis throughout):**

- 1) The investigation concluded that the highest ranks of the Iranian regime had told Hezbollah to carry out the attack against AMIA. **The Iranian regime employed Hezbollah's terrorist infrastructure, which** served as an instrument for realizing Iranian foreign policy objectives.
- 2) **The report did not ignore the fact that the attack was carried out for reasons linked to the conflict in the Middle East (including the abduction of Mustafa Dirani and the Israeli bombing of the Hezbollah training camp in the Beqa'a Valley). However, based on the evidence collected,** it concluded that the fundamental reason was the Argentinean government's unilateral decision to terminate the nuclear materials and technology supply agreements that had been concluded some years previously between Argentina and Iran.
- 3) **The report describes in detail** how the Iranian upper echelons arrived at the decision to carry out the attack. **It was the work of a group called the Special Affairs Committee, whose members at that time were Ali Khamenei, Ali Rafsanjani, Ali Fallahian and Ali**

²⁸For further information see the November 14, 2006 bulletin "**Argentina accuses Iran of responsibility for the Hezbollah terrorist attack which destroyed Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, 1994. The Argentinean Attorney General's office announced it had found Iran responsible for the terrorist attack and an Argentinean judge issued arrest warrants for seven senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah member**" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/argentina_amia_e.htm.

Velayati. They met in the Iranian city of Mashhad on August 14, 1993 and decided to carry out a terrorist attack in Argentina.

4) The report also gives details of the vast intelligence network set up by the Iranian regime in Buenos Aires, without which they could not have been able to attack the AMIA building. **According to the report,** in the mid 1980s the Iranians began establishing a vast spy network which became a complete intelligence service and included the Iranian embassy and its cultural center in Buenos Aires. **It also included extremist elements within Argentina's Muslim communities in Buenos Aires and other cities.** (Note: **An excellent example of the link that existed and may still exist between Iran's terrorist and intelligence activities on the one hand and its religious and cultural activities on the other.**)

5) Mohsen Rabbani was posted to the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires as a "cultural attaché." **He had also attended the Mashhad meeting, and after his return to Argentina, funds (detailed in the report) were transferred to finance the attack. The Argentineans have a great deal of evidence,** including transcripts of telephone conversations, proving Rabbani's involvement in logistical preparations for the attack. **The report also states that Ali Fallahian, the Iranian minister of intelligence, was in charge of overall the operation's coordination.** (Note: **For Mohsen Rabbani's propaganda and subversive activities in Latin America, see below. He currently carries them out from Qom in Iran, where he went after he was deported from Argentina.**)

6) The attack was carried out by Hezbollah terrorist-operatives who arrived in Argentina on July 1, 1994. **Imad Mughniyeh, head of Hezbollah's External Security Service, was responsible for running the operational squad** and to that end entered Argentina at the beginning of July 1994. **The Argentineans have records of many phone conversations involving Mughniyeh, the cell which carried out the attack, Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon and Hezbollah's network in the Brazilian region known as the triple frontier.**²⁹ On July 18 the last call received by the Imad Mughniyeh's cell phone was recorded, indicating that they attack has been carried out.

7) **On July 18, at 9:53 in the morning,** a suicide bomber named Ibrahim Hussein Berro **blew himself up inside a Renault van carrying 300-400 kg (660-880 lbs) of explosives.** (Note: **The Berros are a Shi'ite family in south Lebanon, some of whose members are involved in international drug trafficking.**) **The explosives were detonated in front of the AMIA building, killing 85 people and wounding 151, and collapsing the front of the building. The report states that the method of the attack**

²⁹The triple frontier is the region where the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet. A large Shi'ite population lives there and Hezbollah and other radical Islamic organizations maintain terrorist and subversive networks in the region. (For details, see below.)

was identical to the one employed two years previously in the attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires carried out by Hezbollah.

50. According to the report, the full version submitted to the judge included an appendix analyzing other terrorist attacks in which the Islamic Republic of Iran was involved. Common to all the legal decisions handed down regarding the attacks was that the Iranian regime organizes and sponsors terrorist activities and routinely employs violence and terrorism as a means of achieving its objectives. The report paid special attention to three cases in which the Iranian regime assassinated its opponents, one each in Germany, France and Switzerland:

1) The murder of the four Kurds, opponents of the Iranian regime, in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin on August 17, 1992: **The verdict handed down by the high court in Berlin detailed the process used by high-ranking members of the Iranian regime to carry out the murders.**

2) The murders of Chapour Bakhtiar, prime minister of the Iranian government in exile, and his personal secretary in France on August 8, 1991: **The murders were committed near Paris and in this case as well, the most senior officials of the Iranian regime were responsible for planning, preparing and carrying out the assassinations.**

3) The murder of **Kazem Radjavi in Switzerland on April 24, 1990**: Radjavi was an Iranian diplomat who had served as Iran's ambassador to the UN and was the brother of Massoud Radjavi, head of the Iranian National Resistance Council, an anti-Iranian organization. The Swiss investigators found that the Iranian intelligence services were involved in the murder. A Swiss judge then issued an international arrest warrant for former Iranian Intelligence Minister, Ali
Fallahian.

Section II – Iranian and Hezbollah Involvement in Criminal Activities

Iran

51. According to findings presented before the **January 18, 2012 session of the U.S. Congress,**³⁰ **through its proxies Iran is involved in numerous criminal activities in Latin America:** "Iran has used its proxies in Latin America to raise revenues through illicit activities, including drug and arms trafficking, counterfeiting, money laundering, forging travel documents, pirating software and music and providing [a safe] haven and assistance to other terrorists transiting the region." **In our assessment those criminal activities may be used to establish networks to help Iran and Hezbollah carry out terrorist attacks in Latin America and the United States. Such attacks may be launched following an Iranian decision, as was demonstrated by the attempt to assassinate Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States.**

52. **For Iran, Venezuela,** its main political ally, is also a **launching pad for drug trafficking across Latin America.** In his February 2012 article titled "**Iran's Venezuelan Gateway,**" **Norman A. Bailey** wrote:³¹

"Drug trafficking: Iranian involvement in **drug trafficking through Venezuela, to Central America, Mexico, the U.S, the Caribbean and to Europe through West Africa** is both extensive and **well documented.** The proceeds of this illicit trade **are used to finance further penetration of Iranian interests into the region,** as well as to at **least partially fund the terrorist organizations** mentioned above. Detailed Drug Enforcement Agency and United Nations studies have reported on the extensive drug trade from eastern Venezuela to West Africa and then onward to Europe. **Supply for this pipeline is believed to come from Iranian installations in the delta of the Orinoco River,** where 'tuna' boats and other vessels **load cocaine from Iranian installations and then sent upstream.** Other narcotics routes through Venezuela similarly channel cocaine via Santo Domingo (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) to the Gulf Coast of the United States and the west coast of Florida. Cocaine is also flown or shipped through central America, particularly Honduras and Guatemala, into Mexico and the U.S. **Protection of the drug trade by the Venezuelan National Guard is so prevalent and notorious** the Guard is sometimes referred to as an additional drug cartel (Cartel de los Soles, after the National Guards insignia of rank)." (ITIC emphasis. Original footnotes are not included.)

³⁰ thomas.loc.gov

³¹ foreignaffairs.house.gov. Norman Bailey is President of the Institute for Global Economic Growth and a professor at the Institute of World Politics in Washington. He is a former member of the National Security Council and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI).

53. **A number of reports published by U.S. and Mexican experts in recent years have focused on the threats posed to the United States by Hezbollah's criminal relations with drug cartels in Mexico:**

1) On July 7, 2011, **Douglas Farah**, formerly a reporter for the Washington Post and currently a senior fellow of the International Assessment and Strategy Center and a professor at Brown University, testified before Congress about Hezbollah's activity in Latin America. He stated that Hezbollah was deeply involved in Latin American **cocaine trafficking and that it operated along the American-Mexican border**. According to Farah, Hezbollah provides Mexican smugglers with the same kind of technology it uses in Lebanon to build sophisticated drug-trafficking tunnels along the Mexico's border with the United States.³²

2) In July 2008 **the online edition of the Mexican newspaper El Universal** published intelligence information obtained from DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) sources. The information suggested that **drug cartels** in the Gulf of Mexico and in Sinaloa **sent their members to Iran, where the Revolutionary Guards trained them in the use of IEDs and sniper rifles**. According to the sources, the assassins first travel from Mexico to Venezuela and then take weekly Iran Air flights to Iran. In some cases they use Venezuelan passports. The article said that the United States considered the advanced training, which focuses on tactics, commando warfare, leadership, weapons, and explosives, as a threat to both Mexico and the United States itself.³³

3) Interviewed by the **Washington Times** on March 27, 2009, **Michael Braun**, formerly an assistant administrator and chief of operations for the DEA, said that agents of the **Quds Force, a unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards directly involved in terrorist activities beyond Iranian borders**,³⁴ had started operating throughout Latin America (as of 2009). In Braun's assessment, the agents **control and direct Hezbollah's criminal activities in the region**. Hezbollah, he said, relies on Shi'ite expatriates in Latin America for mediation and for signing contracts with drug lords. According to American law enforcement sources cited in the Washington Times article, Hezbollah is also involved in narcotics and human trafficking in South America's triple frontier region; increasingly, however, it relies on **Mexican narcotics syndicates that control access to smuggling routes into the United States**. The law enforcement officials said that while the organization still had not moved terrorists into the United States through the Mexican border, it was "not a good picture."³⁵

³² theamericasreport.com, July 12, 2011.

³³ <http://www.el-universal.com.mx>, July 28, 2008.

³⁴ See our April 2, 2007 Information Bulletin: "Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the main tool to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran."

³⁵ See Sara A. Carter, "Hezbollah uses Mexican drug routes into U.S.," The Washington Times, March 27, 2009.

4) In October 2011, **AEI fellow and former Ambassador Roger F. Noriega published an article entitled "The mounting Hezbollah threat in Latin America."** It said that in July 2010 Mexican authorities arrested Jameel Nasr in Tijuana, where he was trying to set up a Hezbollah network that would operate in the entire region. It also said that in April 2011 a Venezuelan drug baron named Walid Makled confirmed in an interview that Hezbollah operated cocaine labs in Venezuela, sponsored by local authorities.³⁶

54. One recent example of Iranian operative use of connections with Mexican drug cartels was the 2011 Quds Force (foiled) plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States. One of the two main suspects was Manssor Arbabsiar (who holds dual American-Iranian citizenship), **who had been instructed by his Iranian handler to contract a drug dealer** for the mission. To that end, **Arbabsiar contacted a member of Los Zetas, one of the largest (and probably the most lethal) drug cartels in Mexico.**³⁷ That person, codenamed "CS-1," was a DEA agent who "agreed" to work for Arbabsiar. **Between May and July 2011 Arbabsiar made several trips to Mexico.** He was **going to pay the drug cartel member \$1.5 million,** and wired him two payments totaling \$100,000.

Hezbollah

Overview

55. Hezbollah is deeply involved in drug trafficking, counterfeiting and other criminal activities, and has close relations with international crime cartels. Hezbollah's criminal activities in Lebanon and elsewhere have **two major objectives: first,** to create an independent **fundraising apparatus** for its activity in Lebanon to supplement the money it receives from Iran; **second,** to finance its routine operations of **worldwide subversion and its terrorist networks.** In addition, assistance from criminal groups makes it possible for **Hezbollah to improve its own** (and consequently Iran's) **terrorist-operative capabilities** in Latin America and other locations around the globe. Drug trafficking may also have the ideological target of damaging the **social fabric of Israel, the United States and other Western countries,** contributing to the overall struggle waged by Iran.

56. Hezbollah considers Latin America a fertile ground for extensive criminal activities. One reason is that **Hezbollah has access to Latin American populations of Lebanese origin, including Shi'ite-Muslim Lebanese, as well as close "professional" relations with drug cartels in Latin American countries.** Hezbollah's control of focal areas of criminal activity in the Beqaa Valley gives it another relative advantage, **in that it is able to combine its criminal capabilities in Lebanon with those in Latin America and other countries.**

³⁶ www.aei.org

³⁷ See Thomas Donnelly, "Quds and Zetas," The Weekly Standard, October 12, 2011.

57. At least in the past, the focus of Hezbollah's **drug operations** in Latin America was **cocaine trafficking, mostly in Colombia, the triple frontier region** (see below), **and Venezuela**. For the past ten years Hezbollah has been involved in shipping raw cocaine from Latin America to the Beqaa Valley for processing in dozens of backyard drug labs which it controls (mostly in the Baalbek region). **The raw cocaine reaches the Beqaa Valley by air, overland and by sea**. The processed drugs are distributed by air and overland to users (in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States) by dealers and trafficking gangs. **These drugs are also distributed to Israel** through channels partly controlled by Hezbollah.

58. According to findings presented before the January 18, 2012 session of Congress, **Hezbollah runs extensive drug trafficking and money laundering operations in Latin America.**³⁸ **They cooperate with Mexican gangs in human and drug trafficking across United States borders.**³⁹ Also mentioned was the plot to murder the Saudi ambassador to the United States, in which Iran's Quds Force attempted to use the assistance of a Mexican drug cartel.

Free Trade Zones as Hubs of Criminal and Terrorist Activities

59. Hezbollah conducts most of its criminal activities **in free trade zones which are home to Arab populations**, some of them of Lebanese or Syrian origin, which have considerable local economic influence. Such criminal hotspots include the city of **Ciudad del Este** in the Brazil-Argentina-Paraguay triple frontier region, **Margarita Island** on the coast of **Venezuela**, and the **Colombian** city of **Maicao** in the **Guajira** peninsula, near the Venezuelan border.⁴⁰ In our assessment **Hezbollah's criminal networks in those regions may support its terrorist activities, as evidenced by the bombing of the AMIA building** (at the time, Argentinean reports on the bombing discussed the connection between Iran and Hezbollah on the one hand, and Shi'ite collaborators living in the triple frontier region on the other).

60. In recent years **the United States has become increasingly concerned about Hezbollah's activities in the triple frontier region**, where there is a long-standing tradition of drug and weapons trafficking, smuggling, counterfeiting, money laundering and producing and distributing pirated goods.⁴¹ In 2009 the American-based RAND Corporation released a comprehensive report about the region. The report found many Shi'ites of Lebanese origin live there and that it had become the largest financial center for funding Islamic terrorism outside of the Middle East, particularly for

³⁸ thomas.loc.gov

³⁹ See Roger F. Noriega and Jose R. Cardenas, "The mounting Hezbollah threat in Latin America," AEI, October 2011.

⁴⁰ About 8,000 people of Maicao's total population of 58,000 are Arabs, who dominate the city's commerce. According to earlier reports, many Arab residents donate some of their income to Hezbollah through banks in Venezuela and Panama ("Hezbollah and Hugo Chavez: Radical Islam's Western Foothold," by Samuel Pickell, University of Kansas, 2010).

⁴¹ CRS report.

Hezbollah. According to the report, Hezbollah's profits in the region amount to about \$20 million a year, which go towards funding its activities.⁴²

61. In its annual reports on terrorism, the American State Department has repeatedly noted that **Hezbollah and Hamas raise funds through their supporters in the triple frontier region.** However, the 2010 report stated that there was no information to confirm that the organizations had an operational presence in the region⁴³

The Ayman Joumaa Affair: a Case Study of Hezbollah's Extensive Criminal Activity in Latin America (2011)

62. On November 23, 2011, following a covert DEA investigation, charges were filed in absentia against Lebanese drug lord **Ayman Joumaa.**⁴⁴ The indictment included details of **Hezbollah's close relations with a Mexican drug cartel known as Los Zetas.** It also included details of **Hezbollah's far-reaching network of criminal activities in Latin America and around the globe.** According to testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, the **DEA investigation of the Ayman Joumaa affair indicated that Hezbollah leaders were involved in smuggling cocaine from South America.**⁴⁵

63. **Ayman Joumaa, a Lebanese drug lord, was charged with shipping tens of tons of cocaine through Mexico from Colombia to the United States over the course of at least eight years. He was also charged with laundering money for drug cartels operating in Mexico, Europe and West Africa.** Former DEA senior official **Michael Braun** stated that the Ayman Joumaa affair **was yet another example of how Hezbollah obtained funding through criminal activities.**⁴⁶

64. Some of Joumaa's relatives in Lebanon, Colombia and Panama were part of the drug trafficking network. Joumaa also had ties to the Yousef family, **one of whose members was the network's Colombian contact.**⁴⁷

⁴² For the main findings of the RAND report, see ITIC study on Hezbollah's activities in Latin America (April 2009).

⁴³ CRS report quoting U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2009," August 2009.

⁴⁴ In a DEA operation referred to as "**Operation Titan**" (foreignaffairs.house.gov).

⁴⁵ foreignaffairs.house.gov

⁴⁶ youtube.com

⁴⁷ treasury.gov, youtube.com



Ismael Mohammed YOUSSEF
DOB 12 Sep 1979
POB Santa Marta, Colombia
Nationality Colombia
Cedula No. 17900973 (Colombia)

Ismael Mohammed Yousef (apparently a
Lebanese national), Ayman Joumaa's
Colombian contact (treasury.gov)



Ayman Saied JOUMAA
a.k.a. Aiman Said JOMAA KHARFAN
DOB 21 Jun 1964
POB Al Karouan, Lebanon
Passport RL 0235074 (Lebanon)
Cedula No. 84075050 (Colombia)

Ayman Joumaa in a photograph released
by the U.S. Department of Treasury
(treasury.gov)

65. According to the indictment, **Ayman Joumaa had close relations with Hezbollah and was a middleman between Hezbollah and various drug cartels.** According to American officials, he also transferred funds to Hezbollah through the **Lebanese Canadian Bank.**⁴⁸ In addition, not only did Joumaa transfer funds to Hezbollah through the Lebanese Canadian Bank, he was involved with other financial institutions in Lebanon: **Hassan Ayash Exchange, New Line Exchange Trust and Lebanese-based SOLMAR. He apparently used these institutions to launder money and/or transfer funds to Hezbollah** (See chart below).⁴⁹ It was also reported that according to the findings of the investigation, **an Iranian plane made weekly drug runs between Venezuela and Syria**⁵⁰ (in our assessment it may have been an Iranian-Syrian "service" for Hezbollah's drug business).

66. The case of Ayman Joumaa also demonstrated **how Hezbollah exploits the Lebanese banking system.** The following **flowchart outlines the involvement of the Lebanese Canadian Bank** in laundering drug money and funneling it to Hezbollah. The chart, based on statements made by American officials, appeared in the New York Times on December 13, 2011:

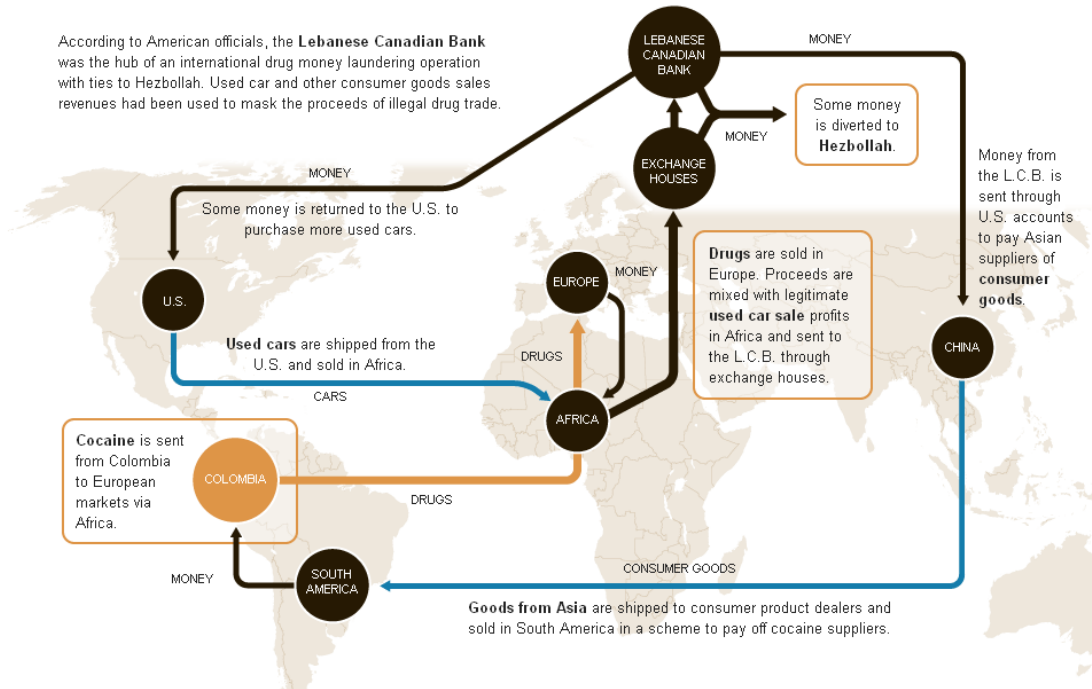
⁴⁸ analysisintelligence.com, justice.gov, youtube.com, investigativeproject.org

⁴⁹ www.treasury.gov, youtube.com

⁵⁰ youtube.com

Money Laundering at Lebanese Bank

The chart below shows the intricate money-laundering system the Lebanese Canadian Bank used to divert money to the Shiite militant group Hezbollah, according to United States officials.



Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act January 2011

U.S. Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control

Criminal Associates and Front Companies: Lebanon, Colombia, Panama

JOUMAA Drug Trafficking & Money Laundering Organization

Heznan Ayyesh Exchange: Lebanon

Elissa Group: Lebanon, Benin, Republic of the Congo

Department of Treasury chart of Ayman Joumaa's criminal associations with institutions, organizations, and individuals (treasury.gov)

67. Following are more examples of criminal activities involving Hezbollah operatives exposed in Latin America in recent years:

1) **In April 2009** 17 people were arrested on the Caribbean island of Curaçao for involvement in a **drug trafficking network with connections to Hezbollah**. The suspects included **four Lebanese nationals**. The arrests led to the interception of two cocaine shipments totaling 2,000 kg (4,400 pounds).⁵¹

2) **In February 2010** three Lebanese were arrested in the city of Ciudad del Este in the triple frontier region on charges of aiding and abetting Hezbollah. One of the suspects, an American national of Lebanese origin named **Moussa Ali Hamdan, purchased pirated cellular telephones and Sony PlayStation gaming consoles to launder Hezbollah money**. The other two, **Amer al-Husni and Nimr Ali Zuaitar**, were arrested for possession of a large quantity of cocaine **destined for the United States**.⁵²

3) **In April 2010** Hezbollah activist **Jamal Yousef** was arrested in New York for possession of 100 M-16 assault rifles, 100 AR-15 rifles, 2,500 grenades, explosives and ammunition. He claimed that **the weapons, which had been stored in Mexico, were stolen in Iraq with the help of his cousin, a Hezbollah activist**. Jamal Yousef was an arms dealer and had connections with drug cartels, which he apparently supplied with weapons in exchange for cocaine.⁵³

4) **In July 2010** Hezbollah operative **Jameel Nasr** was arrested in Mexico. Nasr, a Mexican citizen, was allegedly **tasked with establishing an extensive Hezbollah network in Mexico** and throughout South America. According to the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Siyasa, he frequently traveled to Lebanon to receive instructions for creating **a network for Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards**.⁵⁴

⁵¹ AP, April 29, 2009; guardian.co.uk

⁵² publicintelligence.info, infosurhoy.com

⁵³ publicintelligence.info, www.nytimes.com, terrorismawareness.wordpress.com

⁵⁴ publicintelligence.info

Section III: Subversion and Exporting the Islamic Revolution

Overview

68. Iran invests considerable resources in **its battle for hearts and minds and in exporting the Iranian revolution** in Latin American countries. It **spreads Shi'ite Islam to Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim communities in Latin America**, including **descendants of immigrants from Syria and Lebanon**. Exporting the Iranian revolution is orchestrated by **Spanish speakers from Iran** who have lived in Latin America and are well-versed in local society and politics.

69. One such individual is **Dr. Mohammad Hassan Ghadiri**. He served as Iran's ambassador to Mexico, where he conducted intensive propaganda activities. Currently in Iran, he still has contact with delegations from Latin America (See below). Interviewed by ABNA, a website focusing on Shi'ite activity across the globe, he discussed in detail the question of **why Latin America is a convenient environment for spreading Shi'a in America**.⁵⁵ He said that "During my stay in Mexico, I became involved with different sectors of the population – young people, teenagers, adults, pupils, students, lecturers and so forth. **It is my impression that, in general, Latin America is a very fertile environment for the introduction of Islam.**"



70. **Dr. Ghadiri went on to discuss several aspects of the spread of Islam in Latin America**, which in our assessment reflect the view of the Iranian regime on the issue:

1) "**Latin America was conquered by imperialism**...Christian missionaries were at the side of the soldiers, the torturers...those are terrible memories inscribed on the tablets of history. Therefore, Catholicism, which is the ruling religion in Mexico, was brought in by the imperialists.

2) "...The Americans treat Mexican and Latin American immigrants very badly...every Mexican, from the president down to the simplest peasant, resents it. The bad treatment received by the immigrants makes Mexicans and Latin Americans resentful of the United States. Therefore, **anti-Americanism can be said to characterize Latin America**.

⁵⁵ <http://abna.ir>. For details on the process of Islamization and its impact on Latin America, see Lt. Col. Curtis C. Connell, "Understanding Islam and its Impact on Latin America," USAF.

3) "...America's extensive cultural influence in Latin America and Mexico... naturally encouraged secular culture, weakening the Latins' religious devotion. On the one hand, it is negative because **American culture is corrupt**. However, **the lack, or the weakening of Catholic devotion...has paved the way for a link with Islam and its acceptance.**"

71. In our assessment the view presented by Ghadiri **is in fact currently being extensively implemented on the ground**. For example, on February 16, 2012, it was reported to the US Congress that **in the past decade Iran had created 17 cultural centers in Latin America involved in spreading Shi'ite Islam and Khomeinist ideology.**⁵⁶ The centers conduct activities related to exporting the Iranian revolution and may also constitute a **support network for subversive and terrorist activities**, as seen by the AMIA bombing. One case study is the intensive activity of **Mohsen Rabbani**, who was involved in the AMIA terrorist attack and is currently engaged in exporting the revolution to Latin American countries.

Mohsen Rabbani: Profile of an Iranian Cleric Who Engages in the Battle for Hearts and Minds and in Subversive and Terrorist Activity in Latin America



Mohser Rabbani
 Ex consejero cultural
 de la embajada de Irán

Mohsen Rabbani's picture on the list of wanted Iranians issued by the Argentinean authorities after the the AMIA bombing investigation report was released.



Mohsen Rabbani (bornanews)

Overview

72. **Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mohsen Rabbani** is an Iranian Shi'ite cleric **who came to Argentina in 1983**. He established himself in local society **and was a sheik at the At-Tauhid mosque in Buenos Aires**. He exploited his position to **create an Iranian intelligence**

⁵⁶ americasforum.com

network in Argentina which participated in preparations for the terrorist attack on the AMIA building.

73. In 1993 **Rabbani was transferred to the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires** (with the title of "cultural attaché") **and played a major role in logistical and intelligence preparations for the AMIA bombing in 1994**, in which 85 people were killed and more than 300 injured. Rabbani currently **resides in Iran, from where he directs an extensive network for spreading Khomeinist ideology** in Latin American countries, **which, in our assessment, may also be used for subversion and terrorism.**

Terrorist Past: Mohsen Rabbani's Involvement in the AMIA Bombing, 1994

74. According to the AMIA bombing report released by Dr. Alberto Nisman, the Argentinean special prosecutor, **Mohsen Rabbani participated in preparations for the AMIA bombing as well as in the forum which made the decision to carry out the attack.**

75. According to the report, **preparations for the attack** were as follows (ITIC emphasis throughout):

"Numerous pieces of evidence show that Argentina was infiltrated by Iran's intelligence service, which in the mid 1980s began establishing a vast spy network that then became a complete "intelligence service" that basically comprised the Iranian embassy and its cultural attache in Buenos Aires; **extremist elements that were associated with the Shiite mosques At-Tauhid in Floresta, Al Iman in Cañuelas and El Mártir in San Miguel de Tucumán**; the businesses that we refer to as "fronts" – G.T.C. and Imanco; as well as other radicalized members of the Islamic community, who were in Argentina for the sole purpose of gathering the information and making the arrangements that paved the way for realization of the attack on AMIA on the morning of July 18, 1994.

Our report shows that the driving force behind these efforts was Sheik Mohsen Rabbani, who later became the cultural attache of the Iranian embassy in Argentina. From the time of his arrival in the country in **1983**, Mr. Rabbani **began laying the groundwork that allowed for later implementation and further development of the spy network referred to above.** All of the elements that went to make up this infrastructure **were interlocked**, and involved the implementation of an intelligence service in Argentina that had sufficient capacity to successfully organize the activities that culminated in the attack. As can be seen when one reads the presentation that was made to the judge in the case, the bomb explosion at AMIA constituted this culmination.

In our view, the record shows that once the decision had been made to carry out the attack, the information flow between Iran and its Argentinean embassy substantially increased, basically via functionaries and diplomatic mail. **At the same time, substantial amounts of money were transferred from Iran to one of the bank accounts held by the aforementioned Mr. Rabbani** – who was indisputably the leader of the “mullah” regime in Argentina and perhaps its most representative member from an ideological standpoint – and involved considerably larger sums than in comparable periods that were assessed.

In this regard, we have proven that soon after **Mr. Rabbani’s return to Iran, where**, as previously mentioned, he had been summoned to participate in a meeting during which the decision was made to carry out an attack against Argentina, and only four months prior to the crime itself, **funds were sent to Mr. Rabbani from Iran amounting to no less than USD150,812**, of which USD94,000 was withdrawn prior to the date of the attack (July 18, 1994), and USD45,588 of which was withdrawn over the course of the two months following the attack.

Mr. Rabbani’s involvement in preparations for the attack is demonstrated even more clearly by the incontrovertible documents indicating that during this same period **Mr. Rabbani visited several car rental agencies in Buenos Aires in search of a utility vehicle similar to the one that was parked outside Calle Pasteur 633** [no. 633 Pasteur Street] a few months later. The various explanations the cleric provided (which were obtained from various statements, including ones Mr. Rabbani made during a TV program) were so confused and contradictory that, as can be seen from our present report, they do little more than confirm that the real reason for his search for a vehicle bore little relationship to the various explanations Mr. Rabbani provided.

The evidence we analyzed indicates that **Mr. Rabbani was in charge of the local logistics for the attack**, while other evidence indicates that the then Iranian minister of information Ali Fallahijan was in charge of overall coordination of the operation from Iran. Furthermore, we found that the identical type of work, albeit strictly limited to the operational aspect of the attack, was realized by the then head of Hezbollah’s foreign affairs department, Imad Moughnieh. In this regard, **reports that were entered in the court record suggest that Mr. Moughnieh** was in charge of establishing the operational group whose task it was to carry out the attack. The members of this group in all likelihood entered Argentina in early July 1994, as is shown by the international phone records that were analyzed by our investigation unit.

76. Also discussed in the report is **Rabbani's participation in a forum convened in the city of Mashhad in August 1993, attended by Iran's senior leadership. It was at that meeting that the decision to carry out the attack was made:**

The decision to go ahead with the attack was made by the Special Affairs Committee (Omure Vijeh in Farsi) on **August 14, 1993** in the city of **Mashad, at which time the decision was approved by Ali Khamenei, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, Ali Akbar Velayati and Ali Fallahijan.**

Moreover, two prominent representatives of the Iranian regime that were serving in Buenos Aires at the time were specifically invited to attend the meeting in Mashad (hereinafter referred to as the "Mashad meeting"). These parties were the Shiite cleric Mohsen Rabbani, sheik of the At-Tauhid mosque (and later named cultural attache of the Iranian embassy in Argentina), and Ahmad Reza Asghari (also known as Mohsen Randjbaran), who had served in Iran's renowned Revolutionary Guard, and at the time was third secretary at the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires..."⁵⁷

Exporting the Revolution from Iran to Latin America

77. Having fled from Argentina because of his involvement in the AMIA terrorist attack, **Rabbani moved his base of operations to Iran. Currently based in the Iranian city of Qom, he directs extensive activities in Latin America and makes brief sporadic forays into Latin American territory.** After the investigation of the AMIA bombing, and at Argentina's formal request, **Interpol issued a warrant ("red notice") for the arrest of Mohsen Rabbani with a view to extradition.** Thus since November 2006 **Rabbani's movement outside of Iran has been restricted.** He overcomes the restrictions by **flying from Iran to Latin America (particularly Brazil, where his brother resides) under a false identity and exploiting his diplomatic immunity.**

78. In our assessment, in addition to exporting the Iranian revolution (See below), **Rabbani is in contact with terrorist networks in Latin American countries. Evidence** can be found in a press release from the office of the US Attorney General (October 21, 2011) about **the an imam from Trinidad, convicted for planning to carry out a terrorist attack at JFK International Airport** by blowing up gas tanks and jet fuel lines running under the

⁵⁷For further information see the appendix to the November 16, 2006 bulletin "Argentina accuses Iran of responsibility for the Hezbollah terrorist attack which destroyed Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, 1994. The Argentinean Attorney General's office announced it had found Iran responsible for the terrorist attack and an Argentinean judge issued arrest warrants for seven senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah membe." at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/argentina_amia_e.pdf

airport. **The would-be perpetrators sent cell member Abdul Kadir to Iran** to meet Iranian contacts, one of whom was **Mohsen Rabbani**. Abdul Kadir was arrested in 2007 after boarding a flight to Venezuela, from where he planned to fly to Iran.

79. **Rabbani's skills in orchestrating subversion and terrorism, and spreading the ideology of the Iranian revolution in Latin America are currently being exploited by the Iranian regime for spreading radical Islam and Shi'a in Latin America.** As chief of **Andisheh Sharq (Oriental Thought)**, a cultural institute in Qom, he is involved in **exporting the Islamic Revolution and Shi'a to the countries of America.** The institute sends Iranian clerics to Latin America, trains local activists, distributes Spanish-language propaganda, and operates a website in Spanish.

80. In addition, Rabbani is **international affairs advisor to the president of Al-Mustafa International University in Qom.** Ayatollah **Dr. Mohammad Reza Araf**i, the head of the university, said in late February 2012 that 120 foreign students were enrolled in the university, and that **it was a center for spreading "pure Islam"** (i.e., Iranian-style Shi'a) around the globe.

81. **Mohsen Rabbani frequently meets with Latin American delegations visiting Iran.** In February 2012 **he accompanied one such delegation to a meeting with Mohammad Hosseini, Iran's minister of culture and Islamic guidance.** At the meeting, **Mohammad Hosseini praised the growing pace of conversion to Islam in Latin America.** He said that **"the spirit of *istishhad*"**⁵⁸ had grown stronger as a result of Iran's firm stand against the West. He added that many Muslims in Islamic territories, such as Palestine and Lebanon, inspired by Iran, were willing to sacrifice their lives for Islam. **He speculated that Iran's relations with Latin America would become closer in the near future,** and said that more books about Islam should be translated into Spanish and distributed in Spanish-speaking countries.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Istishhad*—a Muslim's martyrdom for the sake of Allah. In the terminology used by Palestinian terrorist organizations, a suicide bomber is referred to as *istishhadi*, i.e., a person who willingly sacrifices himself for the sake of Allah.

⁵⁹ **Fars News Agency**, February 12, 2012.



Rabbani and Hosseini meet with a Latin American delegation (Fars News Agency, February 12, 2012)

Oriental Thought Cultural Institute (Andisheh Sharq)



The logo of Andisheh Sharq Institute

82. Andisheh Sharq Institute, headed by Rabbani, **directs intensive propaganda activities in Latin American countries, including:**

1) **Sending young Iranian clerics to Latin American countries to spread Iranian-style radical Shi'ite Islam:** To prepare for such missions, clerics train for **three years**, and study a variety of subjects to help them in their activity in Latin America: **Spanish, religions and cultures of Latin America, and skills for converting Spanish speakers to Islam.** In February 2012 **Hojjat-ol-Eslam Ruhollah Maheri, the deputy director of the institute,** announced that registration was open for the **eighth course.**⁶⁰ Those interested were asked to call the institute or send an application form by email (AmuzehSpanish@gmail.com).

⁶⁰ Rasa News Agency, February 15, 2012.

2) **Distributing Spanish-language books to Latin American countries: On March 7, 2011**, it was reported that a few days earlier, the institute headed by Rabbani had **released a book in Spanish containing Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's most important statements** and Quran interpretations by top Shi'ite clerics. According to Rabbani, the institute's books are distributed in **Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil** and other Latin American countries.⁶¹ Hojjat-ol-Eslam Ruhollah Maheri, the institute's deputy director for education, said that **the institute had distributed tens of thousands of Spanish-language books about Islam and the Islamic Revolution in Spanish-speaking countries**. The books, he said, had **"a tremendous impact" on public opinion in those countries.**⁶²

3) **Building a website in Spanish: In May 2011** Rabbani participated in the inauguration of **a new website**, which he referred to as **"the biggest Spanish-language Islamic website."** At the ceremony he discussed **the mission of Andisheh Sharq Institute in Latin American countries:** sending clerics, both Iranians and locals, to various regions in Latin American countries; providing clerics sent to Latin America with training in science and culture; giving Spanish courses to Iranian clerics; helping Islamic centers in Latin America; cooperating with Iranian organizations abroad to establish networks of local activists; creating new Islamic centers and mosques; and running **an online newspaper called "The Third Way," which, according to Rabbani, was "the only [online] Islamic newspaper in the world."**⁶³

83. **In April 2011** Rabbani was interviewed by the website of Qom's religious seminaries. **He went into detail about the extensive propaganda activities conducted by Iran in Latin America.**⁶⁴ Among other things, he said the following:

1) **Many religious groups and organizations have started operating in Latin American countries.** As a result, Muslims and Arabs, particularly in Brazil and Argentina, who had earlier hidden their religious affiliation, were becoming confident and secure enough to be open about their Islamic identity. Many journalists, writers and intellectuals in **Argentina, Colombia, and other Latin American countries, he said, had converted to Islam in recent years, and "the American myth" had been shattered, and the nations of the region cherished Iran.**

⁶¹ sabadnews.com

⁶² Rasa News Agency, February 15, 2012.

⁶³ hawzahnews.com, May 27, 2011.

⁶⁴ hawzah.net, May 1, 2011.

2) **Iran has sent a number of top clerics to Latin American countries** (Rabbani named a few) and more should be sent. **Islamic "cultural centers"** operates in **Chile, Bolivia, Cuba, Colombia, El Salvador, etc.** Local Muslims **also want access to radio and television channels.**

3) **Books about Islam and Shi'a** are distributed in Latin American countries., and the number could be increased to reach larger target audiences. **"We went to local publishers,"** Rabbani said, **"to have them publish those books that need to be focused on. However, Iran is working to establish its own international center for distributing the books..."** According to Rabbani, the international center will be based in **Qom** or even in **Beirut**. "Right now we are busy **publishing thousands of copies of 120 different Spanish-language books about Islam for children, so that more and more children and teenagers in Spanish-speaking countries are exposed to Islam..."**

4) **Iran's academic relations with Latin American countries need to be expanded. The people of Latin America should be taught how to speak Persian, and maybe also Arabic.**

5) **"We have created various websites in Spanish for our purposes...thanks to the freedom of the press in Argentina, we've purchased a lot of air time on various radio and television stations. We have [also] been able to publish many articles in local newspapers...In addition, we have rented an entire radio station that now broadcasts and disseminates Islam..."**

6) **"...We also created an Islamic radio [station] in Bolivia. In addition, we created an online radio station in Colombia. Through the Andisheh Sharq Institute [which Rabbani heads], we are planning to create more online radio and television stations to spread the word of Islam to more and more Spanish speakers...We intend to receive the appropriate licenses from local governments so that we can establish our own official radio and television stations."**

7) **"[Venezuela's President] Mr. Chávez has played an important role in facilitating our activity throughout the entire region.** This is because before Mr. Chávez, our activity was banned by many countries in the region. However, Mr. Chávez has helped us a lot, **and we now enjoy better conditions..."**

8) **"...We need to establish centers for spreading Shi'a rather than just mosques, which Saudi Arabia is building in these countries [in Latin America]."**

Muslims or those who have converted to Islam are very sensitive about such issues as Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, etc...These Muslims pray for Iran, and they do not want to see Iranian society divided..."

Clerics in Latin America Handled by Rabbani

Argentina

Activity in Argentina

84. For several decades Iran has conducted intensive propaganda activity in Argentina. It is directed in part by Mohsen Rabbani, who operated in Buenos Aires in the 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s and is currently based in Iran. His activity includes disseminating radical Shi'ite Islam in Argentina, increasing support for Iran and Hezbollah, and inculcating hatred of Israel and the United States.

85. His activity is shown in the following photographs:



A delegation of La Asociación Argentino Islámica, an Argentina-based pro-Iranian organization, on a visit to Iran in 2008. The delegation members carry the flags of Iran (right) and Hezbollah (left) (elrejunteil.wordpress.com)



Anti-Israeli demonstration held in Argentina in 2009: one of the demonstrators (right) is dressed as a Shi'ite (Iranian) cleric; another (left) is wearing a shirt with the Hezbollah logo (mdzol.com)



The homepage of La Asociación Argentino Islámica (as of March 11, 2012). The connection to Iran is clear: the homepage features a photograph of Ayatollah Khomeini and a photograph of a demonstration in Argentina where participants carried Hezbollah flags and a photograph of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (asai.org.ar)

86. According to Ambassador Noriega's testimony before the US Senate, **at least two mosques in Buenos Aires, the Al-Imam mosque and the At-Tauhíd mosque, are run by sheiks recruited by Rabbani.** The Al-Imam mosque is headed by **Sheik Abdullah Madani.** The mosque is also the headquarters of the **Asociación Islámica**, one of the most prominent Islamic cultural centers in Latin America, established in 1990.



The Al-Imam mosque in Buenos Aires (la Mezquita Al-Imam de Cañuelas), which also serves as a cultural center. The emblem of Iran can be seen above the door (shiatv.net)

87. In his testimony, Noriega also describes **the activity of Rabbani's disciples outside of Argentina:**

- 1) **Sheik Karim Abdul Paz**, who studied under Rabbani in Qom for five years and succeeded him as the head of the At-Tauhíd mosque in Buenos Aires. The sheik is currently the imam of an Islamic cultural center in Puerto Montt, Chile (Centro Chileno

Islámico de Cultura de Puerto Montt).⁶⁵ The sheik **does not hide his sympathies for Middle Eastern terrorist organizations** and maintains that Hezbollah is not a terrorist movement, but a **"fundamental part of the heroic worldwide resistance against the US and Israel's terrorist imperialism."** This worldview, apparently, is what Rabbani is teaching to Latin American converts during his courses in Iran.⁶⁶

2) **Sheik Suhail Assad**, an Argentinean who has embraced radical Islam under Rabbani's influence, is a lecturer at universities in Latin America where he recruits young supporters who share his views.⁶⁷ He visited in **Puno, Peru** as the guest of honor for an event hosted by the "Casas de ALBA," **political activist groups formed in Peru** to support the Bolivarian revolution (led by Hugo Chávez). The groups **are hostile to the United States and Israel.**⁶⁸

Brazil

88. **Mohsen Rabbani places great significance on activities in Brazil**, a country with a large Muslim population. **Groups from Brazil** visit him in Qom, Iran, where they receive a "religious training" of sorts. According to the popular Brazilian weekly *Veja*, from 2007 to 2011 **three groups of Brazilians visited Iran for such training.**⁶⁹

89. The Brazilian weekly *Veja* described one of the classes given in Qom by Rabbani, referred to as "professor" by his students, to 17 people. Eight of them were **young Brazilian converts to Islam**, who were sent to Qom and had **all their expenses paid by the Iranians**. When Brazilian police searched Brazilian students returning from Iran, they found **propaganda against Israel and the Jews**. Such recruitment efforts are a cause for concern for Brazilian authorities and **are mostly carried out in Brazil's underprivileged areas**, where there is usually no Muslim population.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Roger F. Noriega's testimony before the Senate.

⁶⁶ freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011.

⁶⁷ Roger F. Noriega's testimony before the Senate.

⁶⁸ caribbeannews.com, February 21, 2012. According to the article, there is reason to suspect that **terrorist networks have enhanced their infrastructure to include the triple frontier region between southern Peru, northern Chile, and northwestern Bolivia**, where the Iranians have mosques and culture centers. In addition, Iran conducts extensive social activities in the region (such as building clinics and educational facilities), and has one of its largest embassies in Latin America in La Paz, the capital of Bolivia.

⁶⁹ freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011.

⁷⁰ freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011.



Rabbani (in a black frame) photographed in Qom in 2011 with eight Brazilian converts to Shi'ite Islam (interamericansecuritywatch.com)

90. According to Noriega's testimony before the US Senate, Rabbani frequently **travels to Brazil** to meet his brother, **Mohammad Baquer Rabbani Razavi**, the founder of the **Iranian Association in Brazil**, an organization which recruits students and sends them to Iran.⁷¹ One of Rabbani's principal collaborators is **Sheik Khaled Taki Eldyn**, a radical Sunni Muslim from the **São Paulo Guarulhos mosque**. Taki Eldyn is involved in religious activities with Shi'a mosques and serves as the secretary general of the **Council of the Leaders of the Societies and Islamic Affairs of Brazil**. In his testimony, Noriega said that the mosque in Sao Paulo was affiliated with a network in the triple frontier region which, according to the US Department of Treasury, provided logistical assistance to Hezbollah.

91. According to **Brazilian sources**, Mohsen Rabbani **used forged documents to travel to Brazil** to recruit converts to Islam. The Brazilian federal police reported that during one of his last visits to Brazil, he acted in a way which could provoke a diplomatic crisis. Police sources said that **Rabbani (who is wanted by Interpol) boarded a flight from Tehran to Caracas, Venezuela. From there he entered Brazil illegally. The government of Venezuela did not disclose to Interpol the passenger list for the flight.** An article on the incident said that the Tehran-Caracas flight, operated by Iran's official carrier, is referred to as "Aeroterror" by intelligence officials since it facilitates the access of terrorist suspects to Latin American countries. **Brazilian security services, which had put Rabbani under surveillance, were planning to detain him in Brazil, but he was able to escape.**⁷²

92. Another cleric mentioned to the Senate by Ambassador Noriega was **Sheik Khaled Taqi Aldyn**, an Islamist from the Guarulhos mosque in **São Paulo, Brazil**. He is affiliated with Shi'ite mosques in Latin America and was chairman of the **Council of the Leaders of the**

⁷¹ freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011.

⁷² freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011; Merco Press (South Atlantic News Agency), April 4, 2011, freerepublic.com; Anna Mahjar-Barducci, "Iranian Mullah Responsible for terrorist attacks in Argentina (freerepublic.com, June 24, 2011).

Societies and Islamic Affairs of Brazil. According to the testimony, the São Paulo mosque was found to be associated with a network in the triple frontier region which provides Hezbollah with extensive financial and logistical assistance.⁷³

Conclusions

93. The implications of Rabbani's activities in Brazil and Argentina were presented by **Dr. Alberto Nisman**, Argentina's prosecutor general, who investigated the AMIA bombing: "Rabbani is a **serious threat, including in Brazil. In Argentina**, he spread his vision of radical, extremist, and violent Islam, **which resulted in dozens of casualties during the Buenos Aires terrorist attacks. Now, based in Iran, he continues to play a significant role in the spread of extremism in Latin America.**"⁷⁴

Dr. Mohammad Hassan Ghadiri Abyaneh: Profile of an Iranian Foreign Ministry Official Involved in the Battle for Hearts and Minds in Latin America



Rafanews

Photo: Ali Mokhtari

Dr. Mohammad Hassan Ghadiri

Overview

94. **Mohammad Hassan Ghadiri Abyaneh**, born in Tehran in 1953, is a career Iranian diplomat **who has supported the Islamic regime from its inception**. He graduated cum laude in 1971 from the University of Florence, Italy, and received his PhD in architecture. He also received a degree in strategic management from the National Security University in Iran. He has authored eight books on Islam, Christianity, and women in Islam (including *This Is Islam*, published in 2008 in English and Spanish).

⁷³ americasforum.com

⁷⁴ Anna Mahjar-Barducci.

95. **Ghadiri has been a fanatical supporter of Khomeini and the Iranian regime since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.** As a student in Italy in the 1970s he established an Islamic student association which was joined by Iranians studying in Italy. His diplomatic career in the Foreign Ministry began immediately after the revolution; he has been **ambassador to both Australia and Mexico** (and speaks Spanish, among other languages).

96. **Ghadiri is an advisor and top expert for the Iranian Foreign Ministry.** He is also a **member of the International Council** at the Research Institute of Islamic Culture and Thought. He maintains **contacts with various elements in Latin America.** In late February 2012 he hosted a Latin American delegation visiting Iran, and spoke with its members on Islam, **the Islamic Revolution and the revolution's impact on Latin America.**⁷⁵

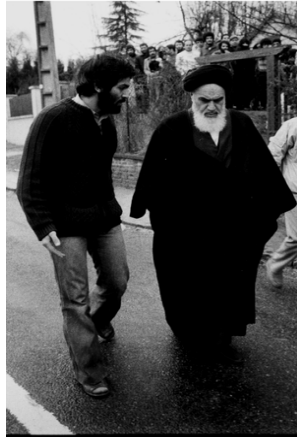


Mohammad Ghadiri meets a Latin American delegation, late February 2012 (ghadiri.ir)

Mohammad Ghadiri's Worldview and Statements

97. **Ghadiri is a fanatical supporter of the Islamic regime in Tehran and is known for his extremist views.** He believes that **radical Islam and Shi'a need to be exported to Latin American countries** by converting locals and exposing them to Iranian indoctrination.

⁷⁵ ghadiri.ir



Mohammad Ghadiri with Ayatollah Khomeini at the Khomeini's Paris residence in 1979 (ghadiri.ir)

98. The following are Ghadiri's statements on various issues:

1). Ghadiri ran for the city of Kashan in the March 2, 2012 parliament elections, but was not elected. Before the elections he told the Iranian media that **"global change depends on the annihilation of the Zionist regime."**⁷⁶

2) On April 31, 2011, Ghadiri gave a speech at the Islamic Awakening Conference held by Khamenei, attended by Islamic delegations from around the globe. **He strongly condemned Saudi Arabia** for allegedly wasting the "Islamic land's" oil money. He suggested renaming Saudi Arabia "Mohammedan Arabia."⁷⁷

3) **Ghadiri endorsed Khomeini's fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie. Interviewed** on February 15, 2012, he again stressed **he believed Khomeini was right and that Rushdie had to be put to death.**⁷⁸

4) **Ghadiri has called on the Iranian regime to execute Amir Mirzaei Hekmati**, a young American of Iranian descent living in Iran, who was arrested in September 2011 for espionage and sentenced to death. That way, according to Ghadiri, "the United States will understand who it's dealing with." He said that if elected to the parliament, **he would work to impose harsher punishments on those who "assist the enemy" and target more people for execution**⁷⁹ (Note: Amir

⁷⁶ ghadiri.ir, February 28, 2012.

⁷⁷ ghadiri.ir

⁷⁸ ghadiri.ir

⁷⁹ ghadiri.ir, January 14, 2012.

Mirzaei's death sentence was revoked on March 6, 2012 by the Iranian Justice Ministry).

5) **Ghadiri strongly supported the Iranian regime's crackdown on the reformist movement two years ago.** He has written dozens of articles against the reformists and believes that **stricter measures should be taken against those who support the protest against the regime.**

Ghadiri's Activities in Mexico: Shi'ite Islamization and the José Tolentino Affair

99. **While Iran's ambassador to Mexico, Mohammad Ghadiri was active in converting Mexicans to Shi'ite Islam and exporting the Iranian revolution.** He sent converts to study religion in Iran, and **reinforced Iranian influence in Mexico.** According to a WikiLeaks document from 2009, he made anti-Semitic statements while ambassador to Mexico. The authorities regarded them as problematic by local authorities and his activities were closely monitored by Mexican secret services.⁸⁰

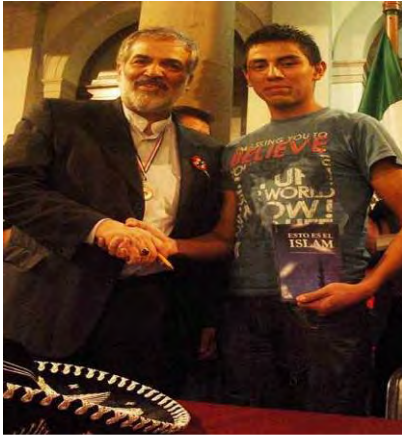
100. **One example of Ghadiri's activities in Mexico was the José Tolentino affair.** Tolentino was a young Mexican **who i was sent to study religion in the city of Qom n 2011** after allegedly **pretending to have converted to Islam.** He said that **the idea to go to Iran arose after a meeting with Ghadiri in the Iranian embassy in Mexico.** At the meeting he was offered studies of Shi'a in Iran **to be followed by the position as the head of a mosque in Mexico to spread Islam in his home country.**

101. Tolentino came to Iran **and studied Shi'ite religion and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Other students came from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.** They were also taught **how to run mosques. One of his teachers in Qom was Mohsen Rabbani. Tolentino said he was particularly surprised by the concept of martyrdom – the willingness to sacrifice one's soul for eternity in paradise – preached by his Iranian teachers (Note: The concept is one of the factors motivating suicide bombers.)**

102. José Tolentino claimed that during his studies in Ira, he was exposed by the Iranians, who found his surveillance equipment, but was able to escape to his home country with the assistance of the Mexican embassy in Iran.⁸¹

⁸⁰ noticias.univision.com

⁸¹ noticias.univision.com



Dr. Ghadiri, while Iran's ambassador to Mexico, giving a copy of his book on Islam to José Tolentino (forum.internet-haganah.com)



Dr. Ghadiri, while Iran's ambassador to Mexico, teaching a young Mexican convert to Shi'ite Islam how to pray (iranhami.ir)