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Argentina and Iran have agreed to hold a joint investigation of the terrorist attack on the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires in 1994. They have done so even though the formal investigation conducted by the Argentinian authorities clearly indicated Iran and Hezbollah's culpability.



The foreign ministers of Iran (left) and Argentina (right) sign a memorandum of understanding to initiate a joint investigation (Presidencia.gob.ar website, January 25, 2013)

Overview

The Argentinian-Iranian Agreement

1. On January 27, 2013, Argentinian President Christina Kirchner announced that Argentina and Iran had agreed to **conduct a joint investigation of the circumstances surrounding the bombing of the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires. The July 18, 1994 attack killed 85 and wounded more than 300** (See Appendix A).
2. In light of the agreement, Argentinian Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, who were in Ethiopia for the 20th African Union

summit meeting, signed a memorandum of understanding regarding an investigation. The investigation will be carried out by a committee, as yet to be appointed, of international jurists who will be chosen by representatives of both countries, but will not be Argentinian or Iranian citizens. Committee members will be able to meet in Argentina and Iran with anyone mentioned in the materials and question them freely. It was also agreed that the memorandum would be lodged with the secretary general of Interpol, who from the beginning has been involved in the investigation and search for suspects, following an international arrest warrant issued by Argentina which is periodically renewed (Website of the Argentinian President's Office).

3. Relations between Argentina and Iran were frozen after the Argentinian authorities issued international arrest warrants for seven senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah operative in 2006 on suspicion of involvement in the bombing. In March 2011 the Argentinian daily newspaper Diario Perfil reported that the Argentinian foreign minister had conducted secret negotiations with Iran. Their objective was a deal, in which Argentina would "forget" about the terrorist attacks on the AMIA building and the Israeli embassy in return for improved relations between the two countries. The contents of a secret document were leaked to the newspaper. They indicated that **the government of Argentina had expressed its willingness to stall the investigation into the terrorist attacks attributed to Iran in return for a renewal and improvement of commercial relations with Iran** (Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, March 27, 2011). Tehran denied links to the bombing but in July offered talks with Argentina to start "shedding light" on the case (Reuters, December 5, 2011).

4. In September 2011 Argentinian President Kirchner told the UN General Assembly that Argentina was prepared to hold a dialogue with Iran and called on Iran to make good on its offer to help investigate the bombing. She added that it was "an offer to dialogue that Argentina cannot and should not turn down." The Argentinian representative to the UN remained in his seat throughout Ahmadinejad's speech, in which he attacked Israel and the United States. He did not exit the General Assembly to protest the speech along with other UN representatives. According to diplomatic sources, Argentina's motives for rapprochement with Iran are unclear, but it may be an attempt by Argentina to tighten its ties with developing nations.¹

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/05/us-iran-argentina-idUSTRE7B408T20111205>

5. In our assessment, the agreement serves the interests of both countries. **It will enable Iran to continue denying its involvement in the terrorist attacks in Argentina**, in which senior members of its regime were involved. It will also facilitate **Iran's** attempts to change its image as a terrorism-sponsoring state and perhaps strengthen its foothold in Latin America. On the other hand, it will enable **Argentina** rehabilitate its ties with Iran and Iran's allies by taking the issue of the terrorist attacks carried out on Argentinian soil off the international diplomatic agenda.

Israeli Responses

6. The Israeli foreign ministry expressed "astonishment and surprise" at the agreement. Sources within the ministry said that the Argentinian authorities had already indicated that Iran was behind the attack and had even taken the necessary steps with Interpol. The agreement currently signed raised serious concerns that the appointing of a committee whose recommendations were not binding **would give Iran the authority to delay the work of the committee indefinitely** (Israeli foreign ministry, January 28, 2013).

7. The Israeli foreign ministry also made it clear that Israel's interest in the issue was obvious and understandable, despite the fact that the attack was carried out in Argentina and targeted Argentinians. **The Argentinian investigation revealed clear parallels between the attack on the AMIA building and the attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires two years previously.** The proven connection between the two attacks gives Israel every right to follow the investigations and expect that both those who carried out the attack and those who sent them be brought to justice. That is especially true since to this day Israel continues to suffer from Iranian-backed terrorism throughout the world (Israeli foreign ministry, January 28, 2013).

8. The Argentinian ambassador to Israel was called to the foreign ministry in Jerusalem for clarifications. He was informed that Israel was both astonished and disappointed by the Argentinian decision to collaborate with Iran. He was also informed that Israel protested Argentina's lack of response when Israel requested information about the new procedure and how Argentina intended to bring the suspects to trial (Israeli foreign ministry, January 28, 2013).

Appendix A

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

9. At 0953 hours (Argentinian time) in the morning on July 18, 1994, a car bomb exploded at the entrance to the AMIA building in Buenos Aires, **killing 85 people in and near the building, and injuring more than 300**. A large part of the building collapsed and neighboring structures were also damaged. Investigation showed that a Renault van used to carry out the attack, driven by a **Hezbollah suicide bomber**. According to forensic evaluation, the van was carrying an estimated 400 kilograms (880 lbs.) of explosives. The evacuation of the bodies took several weeks.



The AMIA building after the explosion. Left: The crater formed by the explosion and the damage done to the building's facade. Right: Evacuating the bodies.

The Bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires

10. On March 17, 1992, a car bomb driven by a suicide bomber, in our assessment a Hezbollah operative, exploded in front of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. It was carrying an estimated 300 kilograms (660 lbs.) of TNT. The explosion caused a large part of the building to collapse. Twenty-nine Israelis and Argentinians were killed and 250 were wounded. The building suffered extensive damage, as did vehicles and other buildings in the area. An organization calling itself the "Islamic Jihad," a fictitious name used by Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for the attack. The organization issued a statement claiming that the attack was revenge for the IDF's killing of Hezbollah leader

sheikh Abbas Musawi (the sheikh died in a targeted killing in February 1992, a month before the attack in Argentina).

11. In May 1999, following a formal investigation, the Argentinian high court accused Hezbollah of the attack and issued an arrest warrant for **Imad Mughnieh**, commander of Hezbollah military-terrorist wing.² An investigation carried out by Israel, whose findings were made public by Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in 2003, showed that the highest levels of the Iranian regime were aware of Hezbollah's intention to carry out the attack and had in fact authorized Hezbollah to carry it out.



The Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires after the attack (Photo from tags.walla.co.il)

The Argentinian Investigations of the Terrorist Attacks

12. The investigations carried out by the Argentinians had both high points and low points. Initially, during the presidency of Carlos Menem, the investigations proceeded slowly and claims were made that an attempt was being made to obscure the findings and conceal information. When Néstor Kirchner was appointed president in 2003 he promised to reopen the investigations and even called the negligence of the first ones "a national disgrace." While time had been lost, the investigative judges received help from intelligence agencies around the globe. Based on wiretaps and forensic evidence of the vehicles and bombs, they successfully constructed a full picture of the terrorist attacks **and the chain of events leading to them, as well as the identities of those who carried them out.**

² Imad Mughnieh died in Damascus in 2008.

13. On October 25, 2006, Dr. Alberto Nisman, the Argentinian attorney general, along with prosecutor Marcelo Martínez Burgos, revealed the findings of the AMIA investigation, carried out by a specially appointed team. The findings were issued in a report more than 800 pages long and indicated that 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.**

14. In light of the report, the Argentinian prosecution asked Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral to **issue international arrest warrants for seven high-ranking members of the Iranian regime and one senior Hezbollah terrorist operative (Imad Mughnieh), all of whom had been involved in the terrorist attack in Argentina.** One of the seven Iranians, some of whom still serve in high positions in the Iranian regime, was **Ahmed Vahidi**, Qods Force commander at the time of the attack (1994) and today Iran's minister of defense. On the other hand, a warrant was not issued for the arrest of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, even though the 2006 report explicitly stated that he had been party to the decision to bomb the AMIA building, and despite the fact that such a decision could not have been made without his authorization.



The seven senior Iranians and one Hezbollah terrorist operative for whom Argentina issued international arrest warrants (Lower left corner: Imad Mughnieh, commander of Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing).

Appendix B

Reports Issued by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center Dealing with the Terrorist Attacks in Argentina

1. **November 29, 2012** – Hezbollah: Portrait of a Terrorist Organization. Hezbollah has a 30-year history of terrorist activity in Lebanon, the Middle East and around the globe, directed against Israel, the Jewish people, the United States and the West, pro-Western Arab states and Hezbollah's enemies in Lebanon.
2. **August 7, 2012** – The Quds Force, an elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, spearheads Iran's global terrorist campaign. In our assessment, the terrorist attack targeting the bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria was carried out by Hezbollah as part of the Iranian campaign and from their point of view was the most successful to date.
3. **August 30, 2009** – The report issued by the Argentinean Attorney General regarding the suicide bombing attack at the AMIA building in Buenos Aires.
4. **August 26, 2009** – Ahmad Vahidi, wanted by Interpol for participation in the 1994 terrorist attack in Buenos Aires, is the new designated defense minister of Iran (still unratified by the Parliament). His nomination signals the increasing strength of the Revolutionary Guards and Ahmadinejad's intention to continue defying the West and subverting the Middle East.
5. **April 8, 2009** – 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.
6. **November 14, 2007** – Iran as a terrorism-sponsoring state
7. **March 28, 2007** – Following an appeal from the Argentinean Attorney General, Interpol issued international extradition warrants for five senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah operative. The charge was involvement in the suicide bombing attack of the Jewish community center building (AMIA) in Argentina in 1994.
8. **April 2, 2007** – Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the main tool to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran.
9. **November 14, 2007** – Iran as a terrorism-sponsoring state: Interpol rejected Iran's appeal and issued international arrest warrants for five senior Iranians (and one senior

Hezbollah operative) who were involved in bombing the Jewish Community Center in Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires in 1994.

10. **November 14, 2006** – 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 (Imad Mughnieh).