



**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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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.



Iranian president Ahmadinejad greets Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez on his arrival in Iran. Their summit meeting was held at the same time as the G-20 meeting (Raheb Homavandi for Reuters, April 2, 2009).

Overview

1. Since Ahmadinejad was elected president of Iran in August 2005, there has been a **marked improvement** in the country's relations with Latin America, especially **Venezuela and Bolivia**. The common denominators are their anti-American ideology and the desire to provide a satisfactory revolutionary alternative to what they consider American imperialism. Iran exploits its relations with Latin America to establish a foothold (using, among other means, Hezbollah) and to establish a political, economic, religious and terrorist-intelligence presence in the region.

2. The springboard for Iranian influence, and the figure marketing Iran to other Latin American countries, is **Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez**, a leader in anti-American defiance. Chavez has met with Ahmadinejad a number of times in both Tehran and Caracas, and in effect opened **Venezuela** – and later **Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador** – to the Iranians. Latin American leaders who were almost unknown in Tehran until Ahmadinejad was elected have become familiar faces, and their relations with Iran are blooming.

3. Iran's increased activity in Latin America is **part of its overall strategy**, and its goals go far beyond the desire to achieve hegemony in the Middle East. Iran, which regards itself as besieged by the United States and stubbornly conducts a nuclear crisis with the West, seeks to pose a revolutionary challenge to America in its own back yard, as well as in various areas of Asia and Africa. To that end Tehran exploits its relative advantages of anti-American ideology and rhetoric. The Iranians use as political leverage petrodollars and Muslim populations, some of them Shi'ite-Lebanese, living in key Latin America countries and potentially able to advance Iranian interests.

4. Those interests, which lie behind Iran's desire to strengthen relations with Latin America, are:

i) To **improve Iran's strategic position vis-à-vis the United States** by posing a potential threat and creating a kind of balance of power which will challenge America by collaborating with revolutionary countries in Latin America and establishing a significant presence on their soil. Iranian assets in Latin America may be used practically in the dialogue the Obama administration is trying to advance with Iran to settle the nuclear crisis.

ii) **Economically**, to erode the sanctions imposed on Iran through new markets. That can be done by coordinating prices with the major oil exporting countries (Iran and Venezuela are respectively the fourth and fifth largest exporters of oil in the world). That also can be done by cooperation in refining crude oil should the sanctions against

Iran be ramped up, since Iran has difficulties in refining its own oil and is completely dependent on imported distillates.

iii) To **damage Israel's relations with Latin American countries**, for example the severing of Israel's diplomatic relations with both Venezuela and Bolivia during Operation Cast Lead. In addition, such a situation creates an internal political climate which **encourages attacks on Jewish communities in Latin America**, as witnessed by the vandalizing of the largest synagogue in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela.



"Get out!" Graffiti on the wall of the Caracas synagogue (Photo by Carlos Garcia Rawlins for Reuters, January 31, 2009).

iv) To **create intelligence and terrorism networks** which will provide Iran with operational options to respond to events or initiate terrorist attacks against Israel and the United States, under the right circumstances when the order is given.¹ Iran uses its proxy **Hezbollah**, whose activities and presence are widespread and increasing in Latin America, including in ordinary crime such as drug dealing.

v) To spread **Iranian, Khomeini-inspired Shi'ite Islam** to the **non-Muslim communities** in Latin America, and at the same time to disseminate the ideology of the Iranian Islamic revolution and Iranian political influence in Muslim communities, especially Shi'ite-Lebanese (part of Iranian activities around the world).

5. As it does in the Middle East, in Latin America Iran uses terrorism and subversion to advance its aims. And as in the Middle East and elsewhere, the main Iranian operational arm is the **Revolutionary Guards**. The Revolutionary Guards assist **Hezbollah, whose activities in Latin America began before Ahmadinejad**, and serve as its proxy for constructing terrorist networks. Hezbollah raises the funds necessary for maintaining the

¹ A recent example of the dangers posed by such terrorist networks is the Hezbollah network exposed by the Egyptians.

terrorist networks in Lebanon and Latin America and connections with local criminal cartels, such as those in the **Gran Chaco triangle bordered by Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, Venezuela's Margarita Island and among the drug cartels of Colombia and Mexico**. During the 1990s Hezbollah and Iran's terrorist networks in Argentina were used to carry out two mass-casualty terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires (the bombing of the Israeli embassy in 1992 and of the AMIA building in 1994) in retaliation for the blows suffered by Hezbollah in Lebanon.

6. **The United States** is well aware of the threats and challenges posed by Iran's activities in Latin America. That was recently made evident by a series of statements from senior American figures working in the military, the intelligence community and the State Department about the dangers of Iranian activity. For example, in January 2009 **Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense**, told the Senate that he was "more concerned about Iranian meddling in the region than [about] the Russians [meddling in the same region]." **Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence**, told the Senate Armed Forces Committee in March 2009 that Chavez's growing ties with Iran and the corruption prevalent in Venezuela were creating a convenient environment which Hezbollah could exploit for its own uses. **James Stavridis, Commander of the US Southern Command**, told the Senate Armed Forces Committee in March 2009 that there had been an increase in the level of Iranian activity, including the opening of six new embassies in Latin America during the past five years and extensive activities concerning religious conversion [i.e., conversion to Shi'ite Islam] in the region. He said that it "is a concern principally because of the connections between the government of Iran, which is a state sponsor of terrorism, and Hezbollah..."

7. As far as **Israel** is concerned, Iran's activity in Latin America is a wasps' nest of **short-term and potential long-term threats**. **Politically**, Iran's activity is liable to sabotage Israel's relations with Latin American countries, as has already occurred with Venezuela and Bolivia. It also encourages physical manifestations of **anti-Semitism** targeting local Jewish communities, as occurred in Caracas, Venezuela. With regard to **terrorism**, Iran exploits its growing ties with Latin American countries to construct **local terrorist networks**, using the Revolutionary Guards and its own intelligence services, with **Hezbollah** as its proxy. In our assessment, the networks are already in place and some of them are operative. Twice during the 1990s they carried out suicide bombing attacks in Argentina and are liable to be used in the future for retaliatory attacks within the more limited Israeli-Lebanese-Palestinian context or even against Israel as part of Iran's overall confrontation with the United States and Israel, for example in the scenario of escalating the nuclear crisis.

8. **The objective of this study** is to examine the various aspects of Iranian policy in Venezuela and in Latin America in general. The study illustrates the dangers and challenges

inherent in the situation for Israel, and even more so for the United States and the West. It is divided as follows:

- i) Iranian activity in Latin America, America's back yard.
- ii) The presidents of Iran and Venezuela: a new revolutionary vision.
- iii) Petrodollars and economic cooperation as levers of political influence.
- iv) Harnessing Latin American policy to Iran's Middle Eastern agenda.
- v) The Tehran-Caracas-La Paz axis.
- vi) Ecuador as a target for Iranian activity.
- vii) Seminars in Iran on Latin America.
- viii) Latin America as a target for the spread of Shi'ite Islam and the export of the Iranian Islamic revolution's ideology.
- ix) The Wayuu tribe and Hezbollah Venezuela as a case study.
- x) Using electronic media for propaganda in Latin America.
- xi) Crime and terrorism in the service of Hezbollah and Iran in Latin America.
- xii) Growing concern in the United States.

Iranian activity in Latin America, America's back yard

9. Iran regards itself as an emerging world power and as having interests extending beyond the Middle East. It conducts policies striving to challenge the United States in Latin America, America's back yard. The rationale behind Iran's activity is to **create a sphere of influence and threat for the United States**, with the eventual objective of reaching a kind of strategic balance. Iran's tactics are similar to those used by the United States in Iran's back yard, i.e., Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf² (the Fifth Fleet has its headquarters in Bahrain) and Turkey (a member of NATO). Ahmadinejad and senior Revolutionary Guard figures have publicly stated that **Iran has already become a world power**.³

10. Iran's political difficulties in the immediate regional arena and the tensions between it and the Arab countries, especially Egypt⁴ and the Gulf States, have forced it to look for partners further far afield. In such locations, Tehran seeks support for its struggles against the United States and the West with regard to its nuclear program, and against the "Zionist entity" [Israel]. The anti-American sentiments of several Latin American countries, which is partially the result of their historical relations with the United States, provides Iran with fertile ground for promoting its own policies and for adding new elements to their own developing relationships.

11. Since Ahmadinejad was elected president in August 2005, Iran has developed closer relations with the revolutionary Latin American countries which resist the United States and defy its regional presence. Ahmadinejad's overblown vision of leading a world camp opposed to American hegemony and creating a new (Islamic) world order, and his determination to export the ideology of the Islamic revolution and Shi'ite Islam to Latin America, mesh with the revolutionary ideology of Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, and with the political, economic and social changes in Venezuela and beyond.

² Which the Arabs call the "Arab Gulf."

³ Publicly, the heads of the Iranian regime and high-ranking figures in the political and security institutions claim that **Iran has already become a world power**. The launching of the Iranian satellite "Omid" and the progress made in its nuclear program contribute greatly to strengthening the Iranian perception of being a power. In our assessment, the Iranian declarations are an authentic representation of the country's estimation that the global balance is turning in its favor, in view of the weakening of the West and the strengthening of the Iranian version of the Islamic revolution.

⁴ The tense relations between Iran and the Egyptian regime surfaced dramatically with the exposure of a Hezbollah network in Egypt.

The presidents of Iran and Venezuela: a new revolutionary vision

12. From opposite ends of the earth, the presidents of Iran and Venezuela **share revolutionary visions** with much common ground. **Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez** sees himself as heir to Simon Bolivar, a 19th century revolutionary who liberated Latin America from the Spanish conquest, and of Cuba's Fidel Castro, "the thorn in the side of the American government" during the 20th century. Hugo Chavez has taken over their role in the 21st century. He has often claimed that his vision is to establish, with the Arabs and Iranians, a new world hegemony,⁵ calling Ahmadinejad a revolutionary and the Iranians brothers in the global struggle. (The same world view makes him regard not only Iran, but Russia, as an ally and strategic partner in his strategy to challenge America's regional and international hegemony.)



Iranian president Ahmadinejad hugs Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, two brothers in the global struggle. Venezuela is Iran's springboard for increasing its influence in Latin America (Picture from <http://faustasblog.com/?cat=31>).

13. Alberto Garrido, author of *Chavez's Wars* (which explores Venezuela's ties to the Middle East) wrote that "There is a desire by Chávez to accelerate what he views as **a strategic alliance with Iran**...The Venezuelan left has for decades considered alliances with Muslim countries as one of the ways to create a new civilization through the toppling of American values."⁶ Chavez is **not only the moving spirit**, he is also the **bond** between Iran and the other Latin American countries which have an anti-American agenda, especially **Bolivia**. Chavez sent his congratulations to Iran to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Islamic revolution, writing that Iran had planted a revolutionary hope in the hearts of the people of the world, and that he was proud to share with Iran the ideas of independence and sovereignty as the basis for intercultural cooperation.⁷

⁵ *The New Republic*, April 1, 2009.

⁶ *The New York Times*, January 14, 2007.

⁷ Iran's Fars News Agency, February 10, 2009.

14. **Iranian president Ahmadinejad** sees himself as turning Iran into **a strong Shi'ite Islamic power** which will challenge the United States and provide a global Islamic alternative to American hegemony. The Iranian vision is of **an entirely Islamic world** and the creation of a "global front against the United States" and a new world order, which Ahmadinejad emphasizes as part of his belief in the Mahdi (the Messiah, according to Shi'ite Islam). In the Iranian vision, **Latin America and Africa serve as fertile ground** and a **convenient arena for extensive Iranian political, economic and even subversive terrorist activity**.

15. **Parviz Davoodi**, Iranian vice president, said that "Iran has influence on various regional equations...Today no resolution can be reached concerning the crises in Iraq and Afghanistan without an Iranian presence...Today the ideology of the Iranian Islamic Republic has infiltrated not on this region [the Middle East] but Latin America and worldwide as well...It is a sign of Iran's global strength and sovereignty, achieved by faith in Allah and the descendants of the prophet [members of the Ali family]."⁸ Regarding Iran's growing strength in international affairs, Davoodi said that "we challenged the power of the veto of the great powers in the international arena and showed our determination concerning our nuclear rights...**Iran's revolutionary mentality has trickled into Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa and even Europe and the United States...and especially the countries of this region** [i.e., the Middle East]."⁹

16. Since his election, Ahmadinejad has spoken with Hugo Chavez a number of times (in Tehran, Caracas and Gambia, where a conference of African leaders was held). He also met with **Nicaraguan** president Daniel Ortega, **Bolivian** president Evo Morales and **Ecuadorian** president Rafael Correa Delgado. Chavez visited Iran in July 2006, July 2007, and April 2009, speaking with Ahmadinejad each time. During his last visit to Tehran in April 2009 he also met with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, as well as with Ahmadinejad. On April 3 Chavez and Ahmadinejad attended the opening of the first Iranian-Venezuelan bank. After meeting with Chavez, Ali Khamenei said that the Iranian government had begun a "new chapter" in Latin American history and praised Venezuela for severing diplomatic relations with Israel following the events in the Gaza Strip. Chavez, in turn, praised the Iranian regime, and said he was "a student of the Islamic revolution and its leaders."¹⁰ After the visit both Iran and Venezuela announced their intentions to expand relations between the two countries and called for a new economic order to deal with the global economic crisis.¹¹

⁸ Aftab Yazd News December 1, 2008.

⁹ Islamic Republic News Agency, August 8, 2008.

¹⁰ Islamic Republic News Agency, April 4, 2009.

¹¹ Iran's Fars News Agency, April 2, 2009. By implication, an alternative to the program of the G-20 countries, which met at around the same time Chavez visited Tehran.



Ahmadinejad rolls out the red carpet for Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, arriving for their own summit meeting, an alternative to the G-20 (Raheb Homavandi for Reuters, April 2, 2009).

17. At the end of March 2009 Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki paid visits to **Brazil and Venezuela**, heading a high-level economic and diplomatic delegation to talk about increasing cooperation between their countries. On March 26 he and the Brazilian foreign minister discussed increased trade and the inclusion of the Brazilian oil company Petrobras in Iranian ventures.¹² Mottaki stated that Iranian president Ahmadinejad would make a state visit to Brazil as an expression of the countries' mutual desire to strengthen the ties between them.¹³ On March 27 Mottaki visited Venezuela to reinforce diplomatic relations. Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency reported that a "**comprehensive roadmap**" would be signed and would link the two countries for at least the next ten years. The agreement was expected to be signed during Hugo Chavez's visit to Iran in early April 2009.¹⁴

18. Senior Iranian figures and the president of Venezuela made the following statements regarding political cooperation:

i) During Chavez's visit to Tehran in July 2007, Ahmadinejad said that "world arrogance [i.e., American] was weakening as a result of the global anti-imperialistic movement, especially among countries in Latin America." On a different occasion he said that "the Iranian and Venezuelan people will stand shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed people of the world¹⁵ in opposition to global imperialism." In the same spirit Chavez said that cooperation between Iran and Venezuela would be effective in confronting imperialism and rescuing other countries. He said that he welcomed Iranian participation as an observer in ALBA (The Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America) calling it a successful model for opposing imperialism.¹⁶ The presidents of Iran and

¹² Agence France Presse from Brazil, March 27, 2009.

¹³ Mehr News Agency, Iran, March 27, 2009.

¹⁴ Islamic Republic News Agency, March 28, 2009.

¹⁵ The expression "oppressed people" is well-developed in Khomeini's ideology, although its origins are not Islamic but rather lie in the Cold War. Its objective is to create a block of the third-world or unaligned countries against the so-called "American imperialism."

¹⁶ Islamic Republic News Agency, July 7, 2009.

Venezuela also met at a local conference of unaligned countries in Havana, where they announced the establishment of “an axis of unity against the United States.”

ii) In February 2009 Ahmadinejad met with the outgoing Venezuelan ambassador in Tehran. At the meeting he said that “Venezuela and Iran are fighting on a common front for exalted, just goals...In the past Cuba and Venezuela were the only countries in Latin America following the revolutionary path, but **today many nations in the regions have joined have joined the revolutionary movement against the arrogant powers**. Luckily, today we see that many of our enemies’ fronts have greatly weakened.”¹⁷



From the website of the Iranian Islamic Republic embassy in Caracas. Left: Supreme Leader Khamenei, with the Iranian flag in the background. Right: The Ayatollah Khomeini.

iii) During Ahmadinejad’s visit to Venezuela in September 2006, while Iran’s nuclear program had caused tension in its relations with the West, Chavez expressed public support for Iran’s right to nuclear energy and to enrich uranium to achieve it. On January 14, 2007, Ahmadinejad visited Venezuela again, extending his itinerary to Ecuador and Nicaragua. On September 28, 2007, he returned to Venezuela, and during a meeting with Chavez called Venezuela “an independent country with extensive influence in Latin America, like Iran in its region” (Islamic Republic News Agency).

iv) Interviewed by the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* in September 2006, on the eve of his trip to Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua, Ahmadinejad said that “in every country where the United States and Britain are thrown out by the people, **the model of the Islamic revolution is welcomed**, from Lebanon and Palestine to Latin America, thousands of miles away.” During his visit to Latin America the Iranian newspaper *Risalat* wrote that “Bush must certainly be shocked to see Ahmadinejad receive a warm welcome in Latin America.”

¹⁷ Iran’s Fars News Agency, February 23, 3009; Islamic Republic News Agency, February 23, 2009.

Petrodollars and economic cooperation as levers of political influence

19. As relations between Iran and Venezuela develop, economic and cultural aspects are integrated into their common political stance, which focuses on opposition to the United States. The sanctions imposed on Iran pushed it to look for new economic partners in Asia and Latin America to circumvent the sanctions and find new markets for Iranian goods. Iran and Hezbollah's lively political and economic activities in Venezuela earned the capital the nickname "Caracastan."

20. Oil is at the center of their economic cooperation. **Iran and Venezuela are, respectively, the world's fourth and fifth largest oil exporters.** Both belong to OPEC and exploit their positions to **coordinate** oil prices on the world market. The two intend to establish a joint company for oil trade based on the euro rather than the dollar to weaken the United States in the global oil market. Iran is interested in investing in the Latin American oil sector because it does almost none of its own refining, and imports distillates from abroad. Tehran's main worry is that increased economic sanctions will include a prohibition on selling refined oil. Iran and Venezuela a joint oil venture in the Orinoco region in the center of Venezuela and in common oil exploration worth \$4 billion.

21. Venezuela and Iran founded a common investment fund worth \$2 billion to finance various projects in their own and other countries.¹⁸ On March 7, 2009, the director of Iran's export and development bank visited Venezuela and met with the deputy minister of the treasury. They discussed an increase in joint economic activity and a program to establish a common bank and currency foundation. The deputy minister called Iran Venezuela's most important economic partner and expressed willingness to promote cooperation with it in every field.¹⁹ Iran is also interested in expanding cooperation with Mexico in the field of energy. In February 2009 Ali Radha Salari, deputy Iranian foreign minister for American affairs, said that a Iranian delegation was visiting Mexico to examine possibilities for cooperation in trade and tourism.

22. As part of joint economic cooperation, Iran agreed to construct 10,000 buildings in Venezuela and factories for bicycles, tractors, cement and bricks/cinder blocks, and in the future an automotive plant. Hundreds of Iranian engineers work in building in Venezuela. Hugo Chavez joked at the expense of the United States regarding the bicycle factory, calling them "atomic bicycles" and riding one at the opening of the factory, which was also attended by Iranian ambassador to Venezuela, Abdallah Zifan. During a broadcast on Iran's English

¹⁸ Press TV, February 28, 2009.

¹⁹ Mehr News Agency, Iran, March 7, 2009.

language TV channel (Press TV) Chavez was shown standing next to the factory to prove it really made bicycles and was not a nuclear reactor, and even proposed selling President Bush a bicycle, saying "My dear friend, president of the United States, I offer you this bicycle, see the bomb. See it... you think that is a bottle of water, no, that's the bomb..."²⁰

Harnessing Latin American policy to Iran's Middle Eastern agenda

23. Alongside Iran's economic activity, it has managed to harness Venezuela and other Latin American countries to its Middle Eastern agenda, especially its political struggle against Israel. Its agenda is first and foremost aimed at serving Iranian interests and not those of Latin America. For example, on March 9, 2009, Ali Larijani, chairman of the Iranian Majlis (parliament), met with the deputy chairman of the Venezuelan parliament who was in Iran to participate in a conference about "Palestine,"²¹ which is at the center of Iran's anti-Israeli political activity.

24. Recruiting Latin America for Iran's anti-Israeli agenda has **borne fruit** as far as Iran is concerned. **Venezuela** expelled the Israeli ambassador to protest Operation Cast Lead and created an atmosphere hostile to Jews, leading to an increase in expressions of anti-Semitism, including an attack on the oldest and most important synagogue in Caracas and the vandalizing of Jewish holy books (denounced by Chavez). Since ties between Iran and Venezuela have become closer, **many Jews have been forced to leave the country**. **Bolivia** also severed diplomatic relations with Israel following Operation Cast Lead.

25. Ahmadinejad's frequent visits to Venezuela have alarmed the country's 25,300 Jews, most of them living in Caracas, the capital, and the oil city of Maracaibo in the northwest.²² Their apprehensions were proved accurate by Venezuela's response to Operation Cast Lead and the manifestations of anti-Semitism after the operation. During Ahmadinejad's visit to Venezuela in January 2007, Heinz Sonntag, a leading Venezuelan sociologist and political commentators, said that the visit was an insult and in fact a threat to the Jewish citizens of Venezuela.

²⁰ <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=59277§ionid=3510212>

²¹ Iran's Fars News Agency, March 9, 2009.

²² The first Jews arrived in Venezuela in the 17th century to avoid Spanish persecution. However, large communities were formed only in the 19th century. The Jewish population increased greatly during the 20th century following waves of emigration from North Africa, Eastern Europe and Germany. During the 1930s, after many Jews fled Nazi Germany, Venezuela barred its doors to Jewish immigration, changing its policy only in the 1950s. The status of the Jews in local society is high but there are occasional outbreaks of anti-Semitism. Venezuelan Jews are represented by the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela (Wikipedia).

The Tehran-Caracas-La Paz axis

26. Iran's common denominator with **Bolivia** is based primarily on their mutual antipathy for the United States and on the millions of petrodollars Iran and Venezuela pour into the country to maintain the Iran-Caracas-La Paz axis. **Abbas Milani**, of the Iran Democracy Project at Stanford University, estimated that Iran would try to enlist support for the president of Bolivia and foster his regime's anti-American position. He noted that getting a foothold in Bolivia would give Iran a card to play against the West. Iran opened an embassy in La Paz, a sign of Bolivia's growing importance in Iranian eyes.

27. Ahmadinejad visited Bolivia in September 2007, arriving in Chavez's private plane. In La Paz he signed documents with long-term agreements for joint political and economic activity in energy, agriculture, industry and mining (**including the search for uranium**), and initiated processes for strategic cooperation in other areas. In 2007 Iran invested \$700 million in a petrochemical plant and other factories in Bolivia. A Iranian diplomat said that Iran intended to open other factories, including one for cement, and dairies, and mentioned Iranian investment in a Bolivian TV stations as well.²³



Ahmadinejad and Evo Morales (from adlroom.com).

28. On the eve of Bolivian president Evo Morales' return visit to Iran on September 1, 2008, the Iranian paper *Siasat-e Ruz* published an article exploring the objectives of Iranian foreign policy in Latin America. It stated that despite its poverty, Latin America played an important role in the global equation, especially in "**stopping the spread of imperialism.**" Countries such as Russia, China, the European Union and even the United States look to Latin America to advance their political and economic interests. Regional importance makes the ties between Iran and Latin America necessary. Thus broadening relations between Iran and countries such as Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba, which enjoy a special (symbolic) status in Latin America can serve as a base for a more **active** Iranian presence in the region. Iran can profit greatly both politically and economically from such a situation. According to the article,

²³ Iran's Fars News Agency, October 7, 2007.

such activity in America's back yard can tilt the American threat away from Iran's borders.

29. In addition, according to the article, direct relations between Iran and Bolivia are important for Iranian activity in Latin America. Bolivia's natural resources include oil and gas, making it a convenient channel for Iranian economic, engineering and technical activity. Both countries stress the **need of independence and the struggle against colonialism** and will therefore be able to realize their potential, especially with regard to the energy sector, to cope with external threats. Thus Evo Morales' visit to Iran, the article concluded, will strengthen relations between the two countries and go far toward promoting Iran's status in Latin America. Iran can serve as a link between Bolivia as well as other countries in Latin America and in the world, in particular the 57 Islamic countries [which are members of the Association of the Islamic Conference], promising large profits of Latin America.²⁴

30. At a press conference held during his visit to Iran, Morales said that "so far, Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castrol have stood alone in the struggle against imperialism, but now there are more and more movements which aspire to freedom and join them...It is the uprising of the peoples of Latin America against American imperialism..." Morales said that during 2006 he was advised not to form ties with Iran, and therefore his current conduct would annoy the United States and Europe, but now he was sorry for the two years he had lost. He praised Iranian president Ahmadinejad and said he was interested in collaboration with Iran in many fields and in promoting various projects "in the spirit an anti-imperialistic cooperation."²⁵ He also promised to move Bolivia's embassy from Cairo to Tehran.



**Ahmadinejad and the president of Bolivia at a fast-breaking meal
(Iran's Fars News Agency)**

31. Evo Morales praised the growing cooperation between Bolivia and Iran, saying that it correctly represented their mutual worldview and Iran as an alternative to the United States.

²⁴ *Siasat-e Ruz*, September 1, 2008.

²⁵ Iranian TV, September 1, 2008.

The growing ties between them have been manifested in **practical terms**. In September 2008 Morales expelled the American ambassador from La Paz, claiming that he was conspiring with the opposition against him (the United States responded in kind). **Morales sometimes jokes that he has joined [George Bush's] "axis of evil"** but in effect that he is determined to strengthen his ties with Iran, and receives encouragement to do so from Venezuela. However, he is met with internal criticism: Jorge Quiroga, who was president of Bolivia before he lost the election to Evo Morales, said "Iran needs international recognition, it needs to show that it is not an international pariah. [Bolivia has] no cultural, historical or commercial ties whatsoever. Bolivia knows nothing about Iran."²⁶

32. Iran and Bolivia have the largest natural gas reserves in the world, and Iran intends to help Bolivia develop its gas infrastructure. In the meantime, Iran is financing the construction of a dairy at Achacachi in the extreme western part of Bolivia. The Iranian representative in La Paz, Bolivia's capital, has already visited the building site a number of times. The local mayor said that Iran had provided a million dollars to build the plant, which will supply milk, yoghurt and cheese to 10,000 poor families. Iran also invested \$2 million to build a hospital for the poor in La Paz's suburb of El Alto, which will be run by Iranians as a non-profit organization. Iran plans to train Bolivian doctors and farmers in Iran and to build two concrete factories.

33. A source in Bolivia's foreign ministry said that the Venezuela-Bolivia-Iran axis **will block American policy in the region**. He said that Iran was gaining a greater foothold and more influence in Latin America as the region distanced itself from the United States, and that president Ahmadinejad was wooing new allies in Latin America to become a counterweight to the United States.²⁷

Ecuador as a target for Iranian activity

34. Iran has also marked **Ecuador** as a target for its activities in Latin America. Ahmadinejad was present when Rafael Correa Delgado, the leftist economist elected president in 2006, was sworn in. In December 2008 Correa visited Iran and met with Ahmadinejad. During the visit Ali Larijani, chairman of the Iranian Majlis, said that Iran's strategy was to deepen political, economic and cultural bonds with South America, and that the Majlis intended to fill a central role in the activities.²⁸

²⁶ <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/world/v-print/story/61600.html>,

²⁷ Iran's Fars News Agency, August 30, 2007.

²⁸ Islamic Republic News Agency, December 8, 2008.

35. At the beginning of 2009 Iran's deputy energy minister met with Correa and other high-ranking figures. Iran promised to give Ecuador \$120 million to build power plants and to found a \$40 million fund, which would gradually be increased to \$120 million, for small business investments. The money is in addition to a \$280 million loan which the Iranians gave Ecuador last year to develop an oil refinery.²⁹

Seminars in Iran on Latin America

36. Along with direct political activity inside Latin America, Iran hosted a number of events and conferences on its own territory dealing with formulating its policies for the continent. On February 27, 2007, Iran held its first conference entitled "**South America: Its role and place in the new international order.**" It was attended by representatives from seven Latin America countries and from Russia, China and Italy. At the opening session Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki read a letter from Ahmadinejad which said, among other things, that Iran and South America agreed on the same topics of independence, peace and justice, and that the conference would contribute to achieving security and peace all over the world. Documents signed by Iran and Latin America countries were displayed at the conference as well.³⁰

37. In December 2008 **an exhibition was held in Tehran to present the economic collaboration between Iran and Latin America.** Iranian vice president Parviz Davoodi said that the economic crisis in the Western world had opened a window of opportunity for Iranian-Latin American collaboration. He presented 200 contracts worth \$4 billion which had been signed by Venezuela and Iran as a model for business opportunities collaboration. The conference was also attended by representatives of the ALBA countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Dominica and Cuba).³¹

38. During 2007 a seminar was held on **Latin American prose and poetry.** Iran is attempting to link romantic figures and revolutionary symbols, such as Che Guevara (whose son was invited to Tehran), and revolutionary Iranian figures such as **Mustafa Chamran**, one of the most prominent figures of the Islamic revolution, who was active among the Shi'ites in Lebanon and was killed during the Iran-Iraq war.³² That is being done to **create a common revolutionary camp between far-flung regions** and to represent them as struggling toward the same goals. To that end, Latin American literature is translated into

²⁹ Islamic Republic News Agency, March 12, 2009.

³⁰ Islamic Republic News Agency, February 27, 2007.

³¹ Iranian TV, December 20, 2008; ALBA: "The Bolivarian Alternative for the People of Our America," an organization for socialist cooperation among Latin American states.

³² **Mustafa Chamran** was a prominent figure in the Iranian opposition to the Shah operating in Lebanon and maintaining contact with the Ayatollah Khomeini. He helped the imam Musa al-Sadr found the Shi'ite Amal movement in Lebanon.

Farsi and thousands of copies are sold. Especially popular in Iran is Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*My Hundred Years of Solitude*).

39. In January 2008 **the Iranian ambassadors to Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia were called to Tehran by Ahmadinejad.** He asked them to explain in their respective countries what advantages they could have by maintaining economic and political ties with Iran. An article in the newspaper *Iran* had the headline "Reasons to expand Iran's ties with Latin America. And according to the article, the region was very important in the international arena because of the size of its population, its natural resources, its enormous potential for trade and for economic cooperation between Iran and Latin America. "There are also," it said, "common political and ideological aspects which contribute to the close relations between [Iran and Latin America], especially the cultural opposition to the hegemony and control of another [state] and the negative approach to American foreign policy, especially in Latin America and the Middle East."³³

40. The ambassador to Argentina (who met soccer star Maradona before he left) gave Ahmadinejad a soccer shirt bearing the number 10, Maradona's number; the soccer star was also invited to Iran. Maradona said "I have already met President Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro...now I want to meet the courageous Ahmadinejad..."³⁴ In April 2008 Ahmadinejad sent Maradona a message via the Iranian ambassador, saying that he thanked him for his support of the Iranian revolution and for the shirt. He added that South America was the land of those who were pure, good hosts and people who were oppressed, **on whose bodies were still visible the deep scars left by [the] arrogance [of the United States] for hundreds of years.** He added the Iranians hoped the revolutions of the South American countries would continue their glorious resistance. Ahmadinejad exploited Maradona's immense popularity to send the message that he knew "that the excellence of young Argentineans in sport, especially soccer, symbolized the nation's strength and its outcry against the ignorance born of foreign rule and arrogance...The Iranian people have always supported movements of liberation and freedom in South America against dictators and the powers of hegemony...and we thank Allah for the awakening of such movements in this part of the world."³⁵

³³ *Iran*, January 12, 2008.

³⁴ ISNA News Agency, January 12, 2009.

³⁵ Islamic Republic News Agency, April 2, 2008.

Latin America as a target for the spread of Shi'ite Islam and the export of the Iranian Islamic revolution's ideology

41. There are between 4.5 and 6 million Muslims living in Latin America, most of the Sunni with a Shi'ite minority. There are two main communities, one whose members originally came primarily from India, Indonesia and Pakistan, and the other from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestinians under the rule of Ottoman Empire and British Mandate, who migrated during the 19th and 20th centuries. Both communities were integrated rapidly into the various countries in which they live, have achieved a relatively high socio-economic standing, which is an important factor in their relations with the host countries.

42. Particularly prominent is **Brazil**, where there are between 1 and 1.5 million Muslims (out of a total population of 170 million). About 40% of them are Shi'ites, the result of a massive emigration from Lebanon. In **Argentina** there are 605,000 Muslims, about 1.5% of the population. Large concentrations of Muslims can be found in **Chile** (320,000), **Paraguay** (500,000), **Peru** (one million) and **Venezuela** (100,000); in no country, however, do they form a significant percentage of the population. In Mexico there are 300,000 Muslims, about 0.24% of the total population.

43. Muslim population concentrations, especially Shi'ites from Lebanon, are **a preferred target for Iran and Hezbollah** for disseminating Iran's revolutionary ideology and establishing terrorist networks in the various countries. In addition to the terrorist and criminal activities carried out by Iran and Hezbollah (see below), Iran has also undertaken **social welfare, cultural and religious activities** aimed at spreading radical Shi'ite Islam of the Khomeini variety among the various communities throughout the Latin American continent. Activities of conversion to Shi'ite Islam are carried out by several organizations, including **Ahl-ul-Bayt** (an organization spreading the Shi'ite message to the world) and other Shi'ite centers operating throughout Latin America.

44. **Latin America is fertile ground for Iranian Islamization and cultural and political activities.** Many countries, and especially poor populations and Indian tribes looking for independent identities and spiritual changes, are ripe for Islamic preaching (the *da'wah*). If in the past the Sunni Muslim countries and Islamic institutions failed to identify Latin America's potential for proselytizing to Islam, today they are active and use strategic programs to promote Islam.³⁶

³⁶ "Hezbollah America Latina: Strange Group or Real Threat," by Dr. Ely Karmon, November 14, 2006.

45. **Mohammad Hassan Qadiri-Abyaneh**, former Iranian ambassador to Mexico, told the ABNA website, which focuses on Shi'ite activity around the world, why the ground in Latin America was fertile for the spread of Shi'ite Islam:³⁷ "When I was in **Mexico**, I was in contact with many strata of the population, young people, adolescents and adults, high school and university students, professors, etc. I received the impression that in general, Latin America is very fertile ground for the spread of Islam. A number of aspects have to be kept in mind:



i) "**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.

ii) "...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**.

iii) "...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.**"

³⁷ <http://abna.ir>. For additional information on the process of Islamization and its influence on Latin American countries, see "Understanding Islam and its Impact on Latin America" by Lt. Col Curtis C. Connell USAF, at <http://www.intute.ac.uk/sciences/cgi-bin/fullrecord.pl?handle=ab559>.

The Wayuu tribe and Hezbollah Venezuela as a case study

The Shi'ite Islamization of the Wayuu tribe

46. One example of an ethnic group influenced by Iran and Hezbollah's propaganda is the **Wayuu**. It is an indigenous South American tribe living in northern Colombia and northwestern Venezuela on the coast of the Caribbean Sea. In recent years, Iran and Hezbollah have been **hard at work on converting** the Wayuu to **Shi'ite Islam** (*tashyi*) using Shi'ite clerics who have the tribesmen recite the Muslim declaration of belief (*shahada*) which turns a non-Muslim into a Muslim. Contributing factors are the Wayuu's poverty and feelings of oppression, coupled with a fairly superficial acceptance of Catholicism.³⁸



Area inhabited by the Wayuu, between Colombia and Venezuela (from Wikipedia)

47. In addition, there is **internal political background** in Venezuela that has made it easier for Islam to penetrate into Wayuu region. When he came to power, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez declared that Catholic priests were not welcome in the region (it is worse for Protestant missionaries, whom Chavez considers "agents of American imperialism"). While priests were being expelled, Chavez encouraged the **activity of Shi'ite Iranian missionaries in the Wayuu areas**.

48. Those missionaries were able to convert several thousand indigenous Venezuelans to Shi'ah (however, anthropologists and journalists working in the area claim that the figures are exaggerated, estimating the number of converted indigenous people at less than a thousand). However, the Wayuu are still an entire tribe which has accepted the Muslim Shi'ite religion. Following the success of the Shi'ite Islamization of the Wayuu, Chavez and the Iranians are now attempting to convert other tribes to Islam.³⁹ A similar process is also taking place among indigenous tribes in Mexico.

³⁸ In various areas in South America, particularly those where indigenous tribes live, the adoption of Christianity is superficial at best. The number of Catholic priests is small compared to the vast territory in which they operate.

³⁹ "Chávez and the Strange Story of the Shi'ite Indios in Venezuela," by Massimo Introvigne, *il Domenicale. Settimanale di cultura*, March 24, 2007.

Hezbollah Venezuela

“If the United States were to attack Iran, the only country ruled by God, we would counter-attack in Latin America and even inside the United States itself. We have the means and we know how to go about it. We will sabotage the transportation of oil from Latin America to the US. You have been warned” (Teodoro Darnott, formerly a Marxist activist and now a staunch supporter of Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez).

49. A network calling itself **Hezbollah Venezuela** is active among the Wayuus and possibly in other locations in Venezuela. Established in 2005, **most of the network’s activists are Wayuus**, who followed the example of their leader Teodoro Darnott and converted.



Teodoro Rafael Darnott (jungle-hut.blogspot.com)

50. **Teodoro Rafael Darnott**, a.k.a. **“Comandante Teodoro”**, was born in Ciudad Bolívar, the capital of the Bolívar province in southeastern Venezuela. Formerly a Marxist activist in the region of Maracaibo in the northwestern part of the country, he is now a **staunch supporter of Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez**. At one time, it was reported that Chavez had connections with the terrorist Carlos, a Marxist turned Muslim, now serving a life sentence in France. The President of Venezuela was highly enthusiastic about Carlos’s doctrine, which established common ground between radical Islamists and anti-imperialist resistance, united by hatred of the United States and the Western values.⁴⁰ While Hugo Chavez himself did not convert to Islam, **his supporter, Teodoro Darnott, accepted Shi’ite Islam**. Darnott described Hezbollah Venezuela as an organization originating with a small Marxist group of peasants who fought against the oppression of the poor.

⁴⁰ The Venezuelan Ambassador to Paris was instructed to assist Carlos and protect his rights. During his visit to Paris in October 2001, Chavez hoped that his request to sign an extradition treaty would have positive results; however, the French government stated that the treaty would not include the extradition of terrorists.



A Hezbollah Venezuela convention (from a study by Manuel R. Torres Soriano dealing with Hezbollah in Latin America, Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla University, Spain)

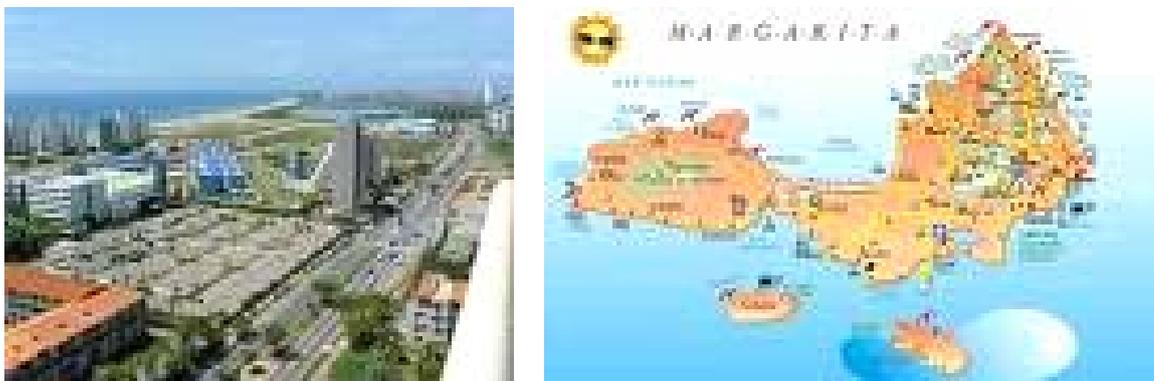
51. The Wayuus' acceptance of Shi'ite Islam **was accompanied by their embracing the ideology and political views of Iran and Hezbollah.** That was reflected in the contents, terminology, and belligerent symbols posted on the Wayuu and Hezbollah Venezuela websites (Hezbollah symbols, photographs of masked gunmen with Kalashnikov rifles and explosive belts, and so forth). It may be therefore assumed that, other than the ideological and political affiliation, there may be also **practical** cooperation between Hezbollah Venezuela and the Lebanese Hezbollah members acting in Venezuela.



Left: Uniformed operatives, a photograph released in South America by Hezbollah Venezuela (junglehut.blog). Right: A Hezbollah Venezuela operative holding a dummy IED; in the background is a hand holding a rifle accompanied by text that reads "Hezbollah," a symbol reminiscent of that used by the Lebanese Hezbollah (from a paper by Manuel R. Torres Soriano dealing with Hezbollah in Latin America, Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla University, Spain)

52. For many years, Venezuela was considered **one of the major centers of Lebanese Hezbollah activities in Latin America.** Of particular importance is **Isla Margarita**, an island off the northern coast of the country which boasts a free trade zone. Similarly to the tri-border area, where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet, the island has become a center for the Arab and Muslim community. It is home to about 4,000 Muslims or pro-Muslims, most of them Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese. Despite their relatively small number, their economic influence on the island is significant. **American experts suggest that the island has a potential for the existence of terrorist infrastructure.** That was

given considerable attention by the United States and was one of the reasons for the tension between the Bush administration and Hugo Chavez.⁴¹



The island of Margarita, off the northern coast of Venezuela (www.freeweb.com).

53. The belligerent, anti-American ideology embraced by Hezbollah Venezuela and its possible links to the Lebanese Hezbollah have been demonstrated in actual **terrorist operations**. On October 23, 2006, **two explosive devices** (which did not explode) **were found near the American embassy in Caracas**. One of them was found in a box containing pamphlets published by Hezbollah Venezuela, which claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened that more would follow. Consequently, Venezuelan law enforcement authorities arrested Darnott, leader of the network. They also arrested Jose Miguel Rojas Espinoza, a student at the University of Caracas (a free institution founded by Hugo Chavez), for allegedly placing the two IEDs in the vicinity of the embassy. On its website, Hezbollah Venezuela referred to the detained student as “the first *mujahed* [holy warrior].”

54. After the suspect was apprehended, the Caracas police chief said that the second IED was possibly supposed to explode near the **Israeli embassy**, but the suspect panicked and threw it near the American embassy. The Chavez administration deemed the would-be terrorist attack to be merely an act of protest to diminish its importance.⁴² The network leader noted that the purpose of the failed [terrorist] operation was to warn the public of the beginning of a war against imperialism and Zionism, and to show solidarity with the Lebanese Hezbollah after the second Lebanon war.⁴³

⁴¹ “Hezbollah America Latina: Strange Group or Real Threat (Long, potentially ominous),” Dr. Ely Karmon, November 14, 2006.

⁴² From an article by Renee Novakoff, a senior researcher at the US Southern Command, entitled: “Islamic Terrorist Activities in Latin America: Why the Region and US Should be concerned.”

⁴³ “Hezbollah America Latina,” see footnote 41, above.

Using electronic media for propaganda in Latin America

55. To promote its goals of exporting the Islamic Revolution and spreading the Iranian brand of Shi'ite Islam, Iran, in cooperation with Nicaragua and Bolivia, uses **radio broadcasts** to spread Islamic messages to South America.⁴⁴ During a visit to South America in December 2007, the chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Ezzatollah Zarghami, met with Nicaragua's President Ortega to discuss expanding mutual cooperation in the field of broadcasting. Ortega said that he would be glad to broadcast Iranian programs from Nicaraguan territory.

56. Zarghami, who took the opportunity to visit Venezuela and other South American countries as well, said that **Iranian movies and TV shows** would soon be available in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, and that IRIB would be broadcasting in Spanish on its multi-language TV channel (Sahar).⁴⁵ He further added, "**Iranian broadcasting is available to all revolutionary nations worldwide**, and Iran is willing to share its technical and artistic experience with its friends."⁴⁶

57. Mohammad Hassan Qadiri-Abyaneh, the Iranian ambassador to Mexico, said in an interview to the ABNA website⁴⁷ that Iran was distributing **more than 300 Islamic books in Spanish**, which were also available on CDs.

Websites affiliated with Iran and Hezbollah

58. In Latin America there are Spanish-language websites and blogs which sympathize and are associated with Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah, at least ideologically. They frequently use symbols, posters and terminology found in the propaganda spread by Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah, including anti-Israeli and anti-Western messages.

59. Iran runs a highly active website (adlroom.com) pertaining to various liberation movements worldwide, emphasizing movements in the revolutionary countries of South America. It features speeches by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, and news from Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia. In addition, the website serves Iranian propaganda and has a link to the Lebanese Hezbollah website; thus, Iran makes a one-stop connection between South American revolutionaries on one hand and the Iranian Islamic revolution and Middle Eastern terrorist organizations on the other.

⁴⁴ *Tehran Times*, December 19, 2007.

⁴⁵ Fars News Agency, December 30, 2007.

⁴⁶ Maher News Agency, December 17, 2007.

⁴⁷ <http://abna.ir>



Pictures from adroom, a website operated by Iran. It contains links to the activities of Iran and Hezbollah as well as symbols of the joint struggle in Latin American countries.

60. In **Chile** there is a website called **Semanario Islámico Latinoamericano** (the Islamic Seminar of Latin America). Besides topics concerning Islam, it also contains **expressions of sympathy for Iran and its leadership, anti-Israeli propaganda, and even a link to the Hamas website**. In the upper part of the website there are photographs of the Iranian Islamic Revolution leaders, the Ayatollah Khomeini and current Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Further down the page are links to official Iranian websites such as IRIB, the website of the Iranian embassy in Chile, and various Islamic websites.



61. Other than its obvious affiliation with Iran, the Semanario Islámico website preaches **anti-Israeli extremism** and calls for a boycott of Denmark for publishing the Muhammad cartoons. At the center of the homepage is an anti-Israeli cartoon, which is a link to an article about a lawsuit against top Israeli officials to be filed in the international court by a group of anti-Israeli organizations. On the right-hand side is a link to a webpage with details about the

boycott of Israeli products as well as products produced by supposedly pro-Israeli companies and by Norway and Denmark.

Cartoon linking to an article about the lawsuit against top Israeli officials



Call to ban companies supposedly helping Israel, from the Semanario Islámico website

62. On the bottom of the Semanario Islámico website is a link to **Hamas's PalTube** website, a file-sharing portal which went online in early 2009. It contains video clips which promote Hamas's messages of terrorism and hate.⁴⁸



Link to Hamas's PalTube website

⁴⁸ For more details, see our January 26, 2009 bulletin entitled "The Internet and terrorism: Hamas has recently launched PaluTube, its new file sharing website. AqsaTube, the previous file sharing website, has changed its name and appearance and is now known as TubeZik. Those changes resulted from the refusal of French and Russian Internet service providers to continue hosting AqsaTube" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/mt_e006.pdf .

The websites of the Wayuu tribe and of Hezbollah Venezuela



The Hezbollah Venezuela logo, inspired by that of the Lebanese Hezbollah

63. The Wayuus and Hezbollah Venezuela have websites and blogs which identify with the ideology of the Islamic revolution in Iran and with Hezbollah's messages of violence, preaching hatred of the United States, Israel and the Jewish people. Postings have appeared in recent years in blogs that are still active but are not updated, possibly due to the desire to keep a low profile and be less exposed.

64. The website of an organization calling itself "**Hezbollah America Latina**" went online several months before Hezbollah Venezuela's attempt to carry out a terrorist attack against the American embassy in Caracas (October 23, 2006). The website introduced itself as the "mouthpiece of Hezbollah in Latin America." It is written in Spanish and in a mixed Mayan-Old Spanish language. Even though it claims to operate in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico, it mostly serves the network which runs the website, referring to itself as the **Islamic Autonomy of Wayuu** (Autonomia Islamica Wayuu), led by Teodoro Rafael Darnott.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ "Hezbollah America Latina," see footnote 41, above.



A Hezbollah blog in Latin America

(<http://www.seprin.com/portal2/notas/hezbollah1/hezboallah.msnw.htm>)

65. The Hezbollah Venezuela website preaches the complete elimination of the sex industry, and attacks the so-called “corrupt upper classes” and the so-called “corruption of the government.” The website also contains anti-Semitic and anti-American texts and articles by Holocaust deniers and Neo-Nazis.⁵⁰ In recent years, blogs have appeared, written by Wayuu Muslim converts **who sympathize with the ideology of the Iranian Islamic revolution and Hezbollah’s messages of violence**. Following are several examples from Microsoft’s MSN portal (which has apparently stopped servicing some of them).

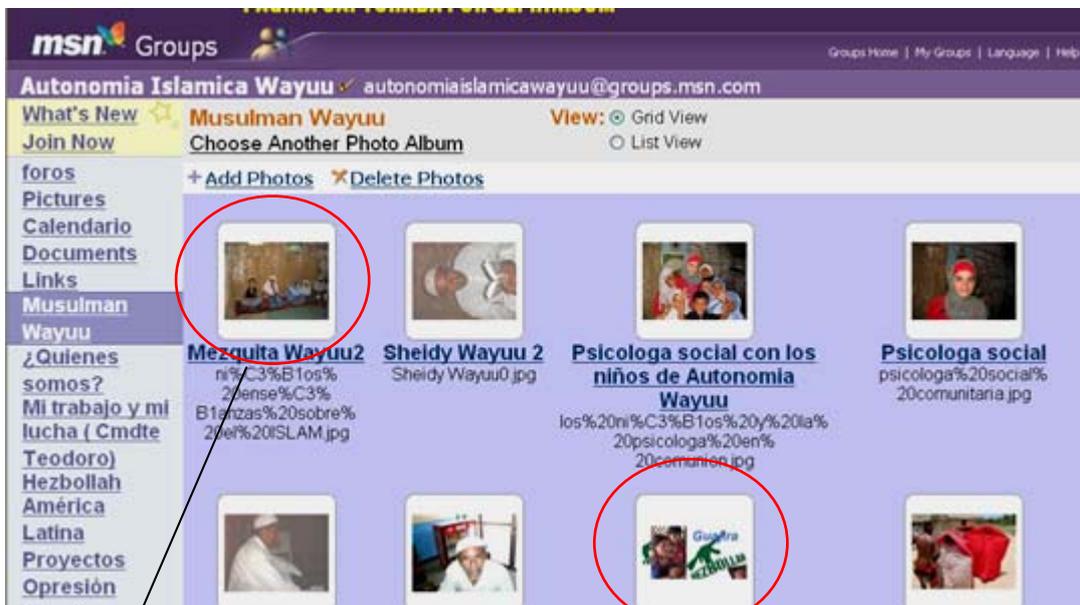


A blog sympathizing with Iran (an image of Khomeini is visible above the massive crowd)
<http://www.seprin.com/portal2/notas/hezbollah1/ideologiafilosofiaypolitica.msnw.htm>

⁵⁰ “Chávez and the Strange Story,” see footnote 39, above



Armed gunmen in a blog which sympathizes with Hezbollah
<http://www.seprin.com/portal2/notas/hezbollah1/hezboallah.msnw.htm>



Photographs from the Islamic Autonomy of Wayuu blog
<http://www.seprin.com/portal2/notas/hezbollah1/musulmanwayuu.msnw.htm>



Magnified view of the image, showing Wayuu girls with their heads covered (in accordance with orthodox Islam).



Magnified view of the image, with text that reads "Guajira Hezbollah" and a hand raising an assault rifle (a symbol taken from the Hezbollah logo). The Guajira peninsula, on the border between Venezuela and Colombia, is home to the Wayuu tribe; the text is meant to symbolize its affiliation with Hezbollah.



Another photograph from the same blog, showing Wayuu girls with their instructor in the center (the Arabic text behind the group is too small to read)

Websites of other networks similar to Hezbollah Venezuela in Latin America

66. Like Hezbollah Venezuela, there are similar networks in other Latin American countries, but their activity is limited. Such networks include Hezbollah Argentina, Hezbollah El Salvador, Hezbollah Chile, Hezbollah Colombia, etc. They maintain close relations with local Shi'ite Muslim communities and with the Iranian regime.

67. Examination of the **Hezbollah Argentina** website shows that it is different from Hezbollah Venezuela: while Hezbollah Venezuela is primarily based on the Wayuus and has its source in extremist, revolutionary radical left-wing ideology, it is our impression that the Argentinean network includes radical right-wing as well as populist elements.

68. The right-wing influence of Hezbollah Argentina's website is mostly apparent in its **anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli, and anti-American postings**, written primarily by Norberto Ceresole⁵¹ and downloaded from such websites as Radio Islam and other Shi'ite websites. For example, the attack on the Israeli embassy in Argentina is referred to as "Jewish terrorism." One posting is entitled "The attacks in Buenos Aires are a result of the infiltration of fundamentalist Judaism, which serves Israel's counter-intelligence."

69. Hezbollah Argentina has ties with a small militant network called Quebracho, which claims to be a political organization fighting for social justice and for a country with economic

⁵¹ An Argentinean sociologist who identifies himself as a Peronist. In the 1970s he was active in the terrorist group ERP. Later he became a neo-fascist, anti-Semite, and anti-Israeli Holocaust denier. He served as an advisor for radical right-wing politicians, as well as for left-wingers and military leaders in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America. Following the AMIA terrorist attack, he contacted the Iranians and accused Israel and the Israeli security services of the incident. He visited Iran and Lebanon. He died in 2003 (Source: "Hezbollah America Latina: Strange Group or Real Threat (Long, potentially ominous)," Dr. Ely Karmon, November 14, 2006).

independence and political sovereignty. The network expresses sympathy with Hezbollah and the struggle waged by the Lebanese and the Palestinians against Israel.⁵²

Crime and terrorism in the service of Hezbollah and Iran in Latin America

Overview

70. Iran uses the **Lebanese Hezbollah** as its major operative wing for subversive and terrorist activities, not only in Lebanon but also worldwide, working against Western and local targets. The Iranian foundations for Hezbollah's operative exploitation were laid in the 1990s, **before** the start of Iran's extensive activity in Latin America during Ahmadinejad's tenure. Even then Iran saw Latin America's potential as a convenient location for terrorist operations, with the loose control of centralized governments in the various regions, the existence of local Muslim population (in part Lebanese Shi'ite), and large-scale criminal cartels. Hezbollah's operations were mostly handled by the **Iranian Revolutionary Guards** and Iran's Ministry of Intelligence, which supported and assisted Hezbollah in building and establishing **operative capabilities combining terrorist and criminal activities**. The main focus of that activity is the **tri-border area**, where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet (and which serves as fertile ground for criminal and terrorist-supporting activities). Other hotspots include Colombia, Mexico and the island of Margarita in Venezuela.

71. Hezbollah's criminal activities (including drug trafficking and counterfeiting) are intended to promote two important goals: the first is creating an independent **fundraising** channel to finance local terrorist networks (in addition to the financial assistance provided by Iran); the second is employing professional criminal networks to **improve operative terrorist capabilities** in Latin America and worldwide.⁵³ An ideologically plausible by-product is the weakening of the **social and economic fabric** of Israel, the United States and Western countries as part of the overall struggle waged against them by Iran.

72. Even prior to the intensive Iranian activity taking place in recent years, Hezbollah saw Latin America as fertile ground for **extensive criminal and terrorist activity**. That is due to its penetration of the Shi'ite Lebanese communities living in Latin America and its close "professional" ties with the drug cartels. Hezbollah's control of the crime industry hot spots in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley gives it another relative advantage, allowing it to combine its criminal capabilities in Lebanon with those in Latin America.

⁵² "Hezbollah America Latina," see footnote 41, above.

⁵³ Including in Israel, where security services exposed drug trafficking networks which combined their criminal activity with intelligence collection and weapons smuggling for Hezbollah.

73. As far as drug trafficking is concerned, Hezbollah's activity in Latin America focuses mostly on cocaine, which takes place mostly in northern Colombia in the tri-border area (see below), and in Venezuela. In recent years, Hezbollah has been involved in both manufacturing narcotics and transporting them to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon where they are processed in dozens of home drug labs, mostly in the Baalbek region. Cocaine hydrochloride (raw cocaine) is transported to the Bekaa Valley by air and sea, where it is distilled and processed. The final product is then distributed to users in the Middle East, Europe and the United States by couriers and smuggling rings, usually by air. Locally produced drugs are traded in the tri-border area and exported mostly to Europe.

Using Hezbollah's terrorist infrastructure to carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets

74. The sleeper terrorist network built by Hezbollah (with Iranian assistance) in Latin America facilitated the relatively swift and highly successful (as far as Iran and Hezbollah were concerned) execution of two suicide bombing attacks in Argentina:

i) **The suicide bombing attack at the Israeli embassy:** On the afternoon of March 17, 1992, a bomb in a truck driven by a **suicide bomber** exploded near the gate of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, demolishing the building. Twenty-nine Israelis and Argentineans were killed and over 220 were wounded. The attack was carried out in response to the killing of Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abbas Moussawi by the IDF the previous month, on February 16. In May 1999, once the official investigation came to an end, the Argentinean Supreme Court blamed Hezbollah for the bombing and issued an arrest warrant for Imad Moughnieh, at that time the commander of Hezbollah's military wing (he was killed in an explosion in Damascus on February 12, 2008).

ii) **The suicide bombing attack at the AMIA Jewish Community Center:**

1) The terrorist attack took place in the morning of July 18, 1994. According to an Argentinean intelligence report, Ibrahim Hussein Berro, a suicide bomber from south Lebanon, detonated a car bomb with about 800 lbs. of explosives near the front of the building. Eighty-five people were killed and more than 330 injured in the attack. In our assessment the terrorist attack was a response to the IDF's strike on a Hezbollah training camp in the eastern sector of Lebanon. The perpetrators were part of a well-established Hezbollah infrastructure in a Shi'ite Muslim community in the tri-border area. The suicide bomber entered the country about one week before the bombing through the tri-border area and was assisted by local supporters of Hezbollah.



Destruction in the AMIA Jewish community building in Buenos Aires (July 1994)

2) In late 2002, the Argentinean security service (SIDE) issued a detailed report indicating that **Iran and Hezbollah** were responsible for the Jewish Community Center bombing. The report exposed the **existence of an extensive terrorist operative network directed by Iran**, involving the Iranian political leadership and dozens of government officials, diplomats, intelligence officers and Hezbollah operatives. According to the report, Iran (including its Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, former Minister of Intelligence Ali Fallahian and former President Rafsanjani) and Hezbollah were directly responsible for the bombing.⁵⁴ Following the report, international arrest warrants were issued for senior Iranians allegedly involved in the attack.

Hezbollah's role in crime and terrorism in Latin America: main findings of the RAND report

75. **RAND Corporation, an American research institute**, has recently published a comprehensive study entitled "Film Piracy, Organized Crime and Terrorism," dealing with criminal organizations operating in the tri-border area. The report states that **the tri-border area, home to many Shi'ites of Lebanese descent, has become the largest financial center for funding Islamic terrorism outside the Middle East, particularly for funding the activities of Hezbollah**. According to the report, \$20 million are transferred annually from the tri-border area to fund Hezbollah, which has numerous supporters in the region.

⁵⁴ The report mentions that **Imad Moughnieh** (the then commander of Hezbollah's military wing, who was considered a wanted terrorist by the US) as the leader of a special ops unit (called "Islamic Jihad"), to which the Iranian intelligence subcontracted out the terrorist attack. The report also contains transcripts of telephone conversations held by officials in the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires with Hezbollah operatives. The report also examines Hezbollah and Iran's ties with Shi'ite collaborators living in the tri-border area (Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay), who helped carry out the terrorist attack.

76. According to the report, the Brazil-Argentina-Paraguay tri-border area, particularly the city of Ciudad del Este, has long been one of the world's largest black markets and a haven for organized crime and terrorism. It is a place where smugglers and criminals mingle with terrorists and the financiers of terrorism. Earlier RAND research indicated that the tri-border area was the "most important center for financing Islamic terrorism outside the Middle East." According to the report, the tri-border area became a focal point of smuggling and organized crime since it was declared a tax-free trade zone in the 1950s. Some **15,000** of the 630,000 residents of Ciudad del Este are of **Lebanese origin**. Most of them are Shi'ite Muslims and natives of the Lebanese Bekaa Valley, a renowned drug trafficking center (the most important focus of Hezbollah's criminal activity). The open sympathies of those Lebanese residents for Hezbollah's cause are predictable and are thus a matter of concern for the intelligence agencies of Argentina, the United States and other countries.

77. The authors of the RAND report said that while it doesn't take significant sums of money to fund terrorist operations, it does take considerable financial resources for such day-to-day activities as training, maintaining safe houses, etc. Therefore, terrorist organizations with the ability to conduct large-scale operations, such as Hezbollah, turn to **crime**, which becomes an important source of financing. According to the document, Hezbollah issued a religious ruling (*fatwa*) which allowed drug trafficking for funding anti-American and anti-Jewish terrorist attacks. Centered in the Bekaa Valley, Hezbollah's criminal activity includes **drug trafficking and counterfeiting**, two criminal industries which thrive in Lebanon.

78. The report examined the case of **Assad Ahmad Barakat**, whose assets in the tri-border area were frozen by the US Treasury Department. Barakat's network is suspected of sending **millions of dollars for Hezbollah in Lebanon. These funds were raised from the proceeds of pirated goods and drug trafficking**, along with a **protection racket targeting local Lebanese merchants**. According to the report, Argentinean intelligence was the first and most active agency monitoring terrorist activity in the tri-border area. Its efforts, combined with pressure from the US government, prompted Paraguayan courts to prosecute the leaders of the Barakat network for financial crimes.

79. On December 6, 2006, the US Treasury Department issued a warrant for nine people and two companies which provided Hezbollah with logistical and economic assistance. Two of the people mentioned were Assad Ahmad Barakat and his brother, Khatem Ahmad Barakat. One of the companies mentioned was **Galeria Page**, a trade center in Ciudad del Este owned by the Barakat network, which was allegedly used as Hezbollah's headquarters in the tri-border

area. A portion of Galeria Page's proceeds from selling illegal and counterfeit goods was transferred to Hezbollah on a regular basis.⁵⁵

Using Iran's growing ties with Latin American countries to promote subversion, terrorism, and crime

80. The foothold currently enjoyed by Iran in Latin America makes it easier for it to engage in subversive activities, which, as noted, began even before Ahmadinejad's association with Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and other local Latin American leaders. Iran's freedom of air travel, the easy visa regulations and the opportunity to meet with terrorist and criminal organizations operating in America make Hezbollah's potential for terrorism **more dangerous and efficient**, when it comes to perpetrating terrorist attacks against Israeli/Jewish or American targets. Such attacks may occur when Tehran decides so, in case of an escalation in the Middle East, or in other scenarios in which the Iranians will decide to make use of the worldwide terrorist-operative potential they have created.



81. The growing ties between Iran and Latin American countries are being exploited by Iran to promote **subversion, terrorism, and crime**. Iranian activity in Latin America, as well as in the Middle East and in other places around the world, is spearheaded by the **Iranian Revolutionary Guards**. One of that organization's main tools is Hezbollah, which takes advantage of Iran's increasing ties with Latin America to gain a further foothold in that region.

82. **The Revolutionary Guards' branching out** into the sphere of economy and their involvement in running major Iranian companies, including oil, industries and construction companies, allows them to use business activity as a front for their worldwide operations. Iran Air flights to Caracas, Venezuela's capital, are used by Iranian businessmen and diplomats, but also may be used by Iranian intelligence and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards for operative activity in Latin America.⁵⁶



⁵⁵ <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/hp190.htm>

⁵⁶ <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/aug/27/world/fq-venzterror27>

The Lebanese Hezbollah's activity in Venezuela

83. Hezbollah's activity in Venezuela is becoming more evident in recent years. One of the operatives exposed was **Ghazi Nasr al-Din**, who served as a diplomat in Venezuela's Foreign Service (chargé d'affaires in the embassy in Syria and expert on political affairs in the embassy in Beirut), and President of the Shi'ite Islamic Center in Caracas. He took advantage of his position to transfer financial assistance to Hezbollah and helped transport Hezbollah operatives to and from Venezuela. In January 2006, he brought two Hezbollah activists who were members of the Lebanese Parliament to Venezuela on a fundraising campaign for Hezbollah and in order to inaugurate a Hezbollah-supported community center in the country. **One year before that, Ghazi Nasr al-Din had Hezbollah operatives brought to Iran for training.**

84. In June 2008, the US Treasury Department, which is responsible for tracking and intercepting money transfers for terrorist organizations as part of the global war on terrorism, added two Lebanese-born Hezbollah operatives residing in Venezuela to the designated list of terrorist elements. The two were Ghazi Nasr al-Din (mentioned above) and Fawzi Kan'an. Biblos/Hilal, a travel agency owned by Kan'an, was added to the list as well. **"It is extremely troubling to see the Government of Venezuela employing and providing safe harbor to Hizballah facilitators and fundraisers,"** the Treasury Department's announcement said. The Treasury Department also argued that Ghazi Nasr al-Din counseled Hezbollah donors on fundraising efforts and provided donors with specific information about bank accounts where the donors' deposits would go directly to Hezbollah.⁵⁷

Iranian assistance to drug cartels in Mexico⁵⁸

85. In mid-July 2008, the online edition of *El Universal* revealed intelligence information from the American Drug Enforcement Administration, according to which **drug cartels in Mexico (GULF and SINALOA) were sending assassins to Iran for instruction in using IEDs and sniping, taught by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.** The same sources said that the assassins traveled from Mexico to Venezuela, where they took the weekly Iran Air flights to Iran. In some cases, the travelers used Venezuelan passports. The advanced training, which focused on tactics, commando warfare, leadership, weapons, and explosives, are considered by the United States to be a threat to itself and to Mexico. The newspaper

⁵⁷ <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/hp1036.htm>

⁵⁸ Mexico, **which does not follow** a pro-Iranian policy, is also exposed to the risks of Iranian subversion. Mexico is home to a sizable Muslim community, with Islamization also being fairly widespread.

further added that several Lebanese terrorists belonging to Iran (Hezbollah) were granted Mexican citizenship through marriages arranged by Mexican drug gangs.⁵⁹

86. In an interview to the *Washington Times* (March 27, 2009), **Michael Braun**, former Chief of Operations at the DEA, said that the **Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, which facilitates terrorist attacks outside of Iran,**⁶⁰ had recently begun operating in Latin America. His assessment was that those elements **controlled and coordinated Hezbollah's criminal activity in the region.** He said that Hezbollah was using Shi'ite émigrés as middlemen and those who sign contracts with the drug cartel leaders. Law enforcement officials cited in the *Washington Times* article stressed that Hezbollah was involved in human and drug trafficking in the South American tri-border area, but that it increasingly relied on **Mexican cartels which control the smuggling routes to the US.** They argued that while the organization had yet to move terrorists across the Mexican border into the US, it was "not a good picture."⁶¹

Terrorism and drugs in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay

87. US Southern Command chief, Navy Admiral James Stavridis, recently testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that **in August 2008, the Southern Command helped several South American countries carry out an operation against Hezbollah-affiliated drug trade in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.** A similar operation held in October 2008 led to the arrest of several individuals in **Colombia** associated with a Hezbollah-affiliated money laundering and drug trafficking ring.

88. According to Stavridis, "identifying, monitoring, and dismantling the financial, logistical and communication linkages between illicit trafficking groups and terrorist sponsors are critical to not only ensuring early indications and warnings of potential terrorist attacks directed at the United States and [its] partners, but also in generating a global appreciation and acceptance of this tremendous threat to security." He further added that terrorist networks included not only domestic narco-terrorists such as the Colombian FARC and the Shining Path of Peru, but also Islamic terrorist networks involved in fundraising and logistical support for parent organizations based in the Middle East, such as Hezbollah and Hamas.⁶²

⁵⁹ http://www.el-universal.com.mx/July_28_2008

⁶⁰ See our April 2, 2007 bulletin entitled "Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the main tool to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran," at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/iran_e0307.htm .

⁶¹ See the *Washington Times* article by Sara A. Carter, "Hezbollah uses Mexican drug routes into U.S.," which discusses the use made by Iran of its Quds Force for terrorist and subversive activities (March 27, 2009).

⁶² <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2009/March/Stavridis%2003-17-09.pdf>

Iranian support for terrorist networks in other countries

89. A Bolivian website has recently reported that according to intelligence sources, the Kalacha region in **Bolivia** is the base of operations not only for the Shining Path but also for other terrorist networks which are function as representatives of Iranian intelligence and of Hezbollah.⁶³

90. According to an article posted on www.montevideo.com, **Uruguay's** security services are now investigating an incident of terrorists funded by Iran. The terrorists used Uruguay's territory as a base for local activity and as a transit site. Consequently, Iranian citizens residing in Montevideo have been put under surveillance.

Growing concern in the United States

91. Iran's far-reaching activity in Latin America and the increasing ties between Hezbollah and international criminal cartels, including drug traffickers, **are a cause of growing concern in the US**, frequently addressed by American intelligence, military and administration officials:

92. **On January 27, 2009, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates** said that he was concerned about the level of "subversive activity that the Iranians are carrying on in a number of places in Latin America, particularly in South America... They're opening a lot of offices and a lot of fronts, behind which they interfere in what is going on in some of these countries." He further added, "to be honest, I'm more concerned about Iranian meddling in the region than I am the Russians."

93. In March 2009, **Dennis Blair, the US Director of National Intelligence**, presented the Annual Threat Assessment report to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Blair addressed the developing personal relationship between the President of Iran and the President of Venezuela, who is attempting to strengthen his country's economic and military ties with Iran despite bureaucratic and linguistic obstacles. **He stressed that Venezuela was serving as a bridge to help Iran build relations with other Latin American countries.** According to Blair, Chavez's growing ties with Iran, coupled with Venezuela's widespread corruption, **have created a permissible environment Hezbollah can exploit.** He further stated that in 2008, two individuals from Venezuela, including one diplomat, were designated by the US Treasury Department as supporters of terrorism because they provided logistical and financial support for Hezbollah members (see below).

⁶³ *La Razon*, March 8, 2009.

Also according to the report, Venezuela is the world's second largest producer of cocaine (after Colombia) and it is the leading departure country of air smuggling to world markets.⁶⁴

94. **According to the 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report released by the US State Department**, during a massive DEA operation which resulted in numerous arrests, its agents were able to make a direct connection between a **traditional Colombian drug trafficking and money laundering organization and Middle Eastern money launderers linked to Hezbollah**. The report also suggests that **Hezbollah and Hamas money laundering operations take place in the tri-border area between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina**.⁶⁵ In an article published in FrontPage Magazine on March 19, 2009, Dr. Rachel Ehrenfeld, Director of the American Center for Democracy and a leading expert on narco-terrorism, says that anti-American narco-terrorist groups found a firm ally in Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, who stopped cooperating with US drug eradication efforts in 2005. Chavez provides these groups with a safe haven from which to transfer money, arms and operatives to and from Syria, southern Lebanon and Iran.⁶⁶

95. On March 17, 2009, **US Southern Command Chief Admiral James Stavridis**, who is in charge of US military operations in Latin America, addressed Iran's activity there. At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Stavridis noted "an increase in a wide level of activity by the Iranian government," including the opening of six new embassies in Latin America during the last five years, as well as "**proselytizing** and working with Islamic activities throughout the region...That is **of concern principally because of the connections between the government of Iran, which is a state sponsor of terrorism, and Hezbollah**," he said. "We see a great deal of Hezbollah activity throughout South America, in particular. [The] tri-border of Brazil is a particular concern, as in Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina."⁶⁷

96. In January 2008, **Admiral James Stavridis**, speaking at a CSIS conference on Latin America, warned that "the connectivity between narcoterrorism and Islamic radical terrorism could be disastrous." He was primarily concerned with "**outside players**" coming into the **region (strongly hinting at Iran)**, and with narcoterrorists' potentially becoming engaged in Islamic radicalism in the Americas. "**This gentleman is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of Iran, a state that sponsors terrorism, he is a very dangerous man and he is in this area of the world**," Stavridis said, pointing at a photograph of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad standing alongside Bolivia's President Evo Morales. He added that Iran had already opened ten embassies in Latin America and that its president wanted to

⁶⁴ http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20090310_testimony.pdf

⁶⁵ <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2009/vol2/116552.htm>

⁶⁶ <http://frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=7DBEBFBE-DFB4-4C29-88DE-41851440F1C2>

⁶⁷ <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-03-17-voa44.cfm?renderforprint=1>

have an embassy in every country in the region. "Today in Latin America there is a competitive environment for us politically," Stavridis said, adding that the United States needed to be a good competitor and show why freedom and liberty were better ideas.⁶⁸

97. In June 2008 **Thomas A. Shannon**, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, said that Iran had a history of terrorist activity in South America, and that its association with the Buenos Aires bombings (in 1992 at the Israeli embassy and in 1994 at the AMIA center) had already been proven. He further added that he was concerned that Iran could use that network in case of a confrontation with the United States. Earlier, Shannon stressed that America was concerned over Iran's ties with Hezbollah terrorists, who were also responsible for the AMIA bombings. What the US was worried about, he said, was the history of Iranian activity in Latin America and especially its association with Hezbollah and with the Buenos Aires bombings. A *Miami Herald* reporter who interviewed Shannon noted that the increasing number of Iranian diplomats in Venezuela and Nicaragua raised the suspicion that Iranian agents would be dispatched to other countries, where they would support totalitarian elements and terrorist organizations and import the Middle East conflict and the conflict between the United States and Iran to South America. While that would serve Iran's interests, it would not be in the best interests of South American countries.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_press/task,view/id,3716

⁶⁹ *Miami Herald*, September 30, 2007.