

THREAT TO THE HOMELAND:
IRAN'S EXTENDING INFLUENCE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Testimony before the
House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Ilan Berman
American Foreign Policy Council

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Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Barber, distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to address the issue of Iran's presence in the Western Hemisphere. I strongly believe that it represents an issue of high importance to the safety and security of the United States. Over the past two years, my organization, the American Foreign Policy Council, has extensively studied Iran's presence and activities in Latin America. This has entailed three separate fact-finding missions to Central and South America to date, the most recent in May 2013. What follows are my observations and conclusions gleaned from those visits.

IRAN'S OBJECTIVES

To properly grasp the challenge posed by Iran's activities in the Western Hemisphere, they need to be understood in proper geopolitical context: as part of a larger "peripheral strategy" on the part of the Iranian regime. To a significant degree, they are a response to growing diplomatic and economic pressure levied against Iran by the West over its nuclear program, and represent an attempt by Iran's leadership to combat their regime's growing international isolation. As such, they are far from unique; Iran's activities in Latin America follow the same broad pattern as its outreach in other areas of the world, including Asia and Africa.¹

Yet Iran's presence in the Americas is arguably more mature than it is elsewhere, owing to the permissive, ideologically-sympathetic environment that prevails throughout much of

the region. Over the past decade, Iran's exploitation of this environment has proceeded along several lines:

Political outreach

Since the mid-2000s, Iran has invested heavily in political contacts with the Americas on a number of levels. It has more than doubled its diplomatic presence in the region over the past decade, increasing its embassies from five in 2005 to eleven today.² Iran currently has an official diplomatic presence in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela.

It likewise has expanded its public diplomacy outreach, launching a dedicated Spanish-language television channel, known as HispanTV, in early 2011.³ HispanTV is funded by the Iranian government's state Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting company (IRIB), broadcasting out of Tehran to some fourteen countries in the region.⁴ The goal of this effort, according to Iranian officials, is to broaden the Iranian regime's "ideological legitimacy" among friendly governments in the region—and to diminish the influence of "dominance seekers," a thinly-veiled reference to the United States.⁵

Perhaps most significantly, Iran has engaged in extensive cultural contacts throughout the region. It has done so via seventeen formal cultural centers throughout South and Central America, as well as through outreach to the various indigenous populations which represent important bases of political support for regional leaders like Bolivia's Evo Morales, Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Peru's Ollanta Humala.⁶ These contacts, and concurrent proselytization activities (known as *daw'ah*), are carried out through a network of "informal ambassadors" operating in the region—a network that has been nurtured and trained by Mohsen Rabbani, a former Iranian cultural attaché to Argentina who is known to have masterminded the 1994 AMIA attack.⁷

At its most basic, this outreach is intended to shore up support for the Iranian regime's nuclear effort, and to fracture the fragile international consensus concerning the need for sanctions in response to Iranian behavior. But Iran's activism also extends to proselytization activities designed to promote its particular brand of political Islam, and ideological coalition-building intended to make the region more inhospitable to the United States than it is currently. "Iran continues to seek to increase its stature by countering U.S. influence and expanding ties with regional actors while advocating Islamic solidarity," the Pentagon noted in its April 2012 *Annual Report on Military Power of Iran*.⁸ Latin America is among the regions where this strategy is being actively implemented.

Economic activity

Latin America has long functioned as a "support" theater for Iran and its proxies, with money generated there through gray and black market activities sent back to benefit the Iranian regime or groups like Hezbollah.⁹ With the growth of Iran's strategic partnership with Venezuela, the Chavez regime became part of this activity as well. With the active cooperation of Caracas, the Iranian government has exploited the Venezuelan financial sector—via joint financial institutions, shell companies and lax banking practices—to continue to access the global economy in spite of mounting Western sanctions.¹⁰

In recent years, these illicit financial flows have been supplemented by formal trade agreements and contracts between Iran and various regional states. To date, the Iranian regime is estimated to have signed approximately 500 cooperative agreements with regional governments, many of them economic in nature. But, with the notable exception of those concluded with Venezuela, the vast majority of these commitments have yet to materialize. Nevertheless, Iran's overall trade with the region has grown considerably in recent years. In the years between 2000 and 2005, it averaged approximately \$1.33 billion annually. As of last year, this figure had more than doubled, to \$3.67 billion.¹¹

Two countries in particular have emerged as significant trading partners for Iran in the region. The first is Argentina, which—despite Iran's involvement in the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israel Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires—has adopted an increasingly sympathetic attitude toward Tehran over the past several years. This has been manifested, most concretely, in Argentine president Christina Fernandez de Kirchner's recent acquiescence to the creation of a "truth commission" to reexamine the AMIA case—and which, ostensibly, can be expected to rewrite history in Iran's favor.¹² Trade ties reflect this warming trend as well; since 2005, Iran-Argentine trade has increased by more than 500 percent, and now rests at \$1.2 billion annually.¹³

The second is Brazil. Political ties between Tehran and Brasilia have taken a turn for the worse since the ascension of Dilma Rouseff to the Brazilian presidency in January 2011. Rouseff, a former women's rights activist who herself spent time in prison, has made a point of distancing herself from Iran, repeatedly rebuffing Iran's diplomatic overtures and signaling her displeasure at Iran's troubling human rights record. Nevertheless, trade ties between the two countries are still active—and significant, from Iran's perspective. Brazil currently represents Iran's largest trading partner in the region, with an annual bilateral turnover of nearly \$2.2 billion.¹⁴ A reinvigoration of the warm ties that prevailed during the era of Rouseff's predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, remains a priority for Iran, and for good reason. By dint of its global economic stature, Brazil represents a geopolitical prize for Iran in the region—the cooperation of which would greatly hamper Western efforts to economically isolate the Islamic Republic.¹⁵

Strategic resources

Over the past decade, as its strategic programs have matured, the Iranian regime has significantly expanded its efforts to acquire resources for them from abroad. Consequently, since the mid-2000s Iran has become a major speculator in Latin America's resource wealth.

Beginning late last decade, it has engaged in mining activity in the uranium-rich Roraima Basin on Venezuela's eastern border, adjacent to Guyana, where it is believed to be involved in the extraction of uranium ore for its nuclear program.¹⁶ More recently, it is believed to have begun prospecting for the same mineral in locations outside of the Bolivia's industrial capital, Santa Cruz, in the country's east.¹⁷ Significantly, the extent of this activity—and whether Iran has actually begun to acquire sizeable quantities of uranium from Latin America—remains a subject of considerable debate among experts and observers, both in the region and in Washington.

More concrete evidence exists of Iran's acquisition of other strategic minerals with potential weapons applications from the region. For example, Iran has become a "partner" in the development of Bolivia's reserves of lithium, a key strategic mineral with applications for nuclear weapons development, pursuant to a formal agreement signed with the Morales government in 2010.¹⁸ Iran is also known to be seeking to acquire at least two other minerals utilized in nuclear work and the production of ballistic missiles: tantalum and thorium.¹⁹ In September 2012, Bolivian police seized two tons of what at the time was suspected to be uranium ore destined for Iran's nuclear program.²⁰ The shipment was later ascertained to be tantalum.

An asymmetric presence

Iran's growing formal presence in the region has been mirrored by an expansion of Iranian covert activities. In its 2010 report to Congress on Iran's military power, the Department of Defense noted that the Qods Force, the elite paramilitary unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, is now deeply involved in the Americas, stationing "operatives in foreign embassies, charities and religious/cultural institutions to foster relationships with people, often building on existing socio-economic ties with the well-established Shia Diaspora," and even carrying out "paramilitary operations to support extremists and destabilize unfriendly regimes."²¹

Iran has likewise invested in regional paramilitary infrastructure. Most prominently, it has helped establish and subsequently administer the "regional defense school" of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), headquartered outside Santa Cruz in eastern Bolivia. Iran is known to have provided at least some of the seed money for the school's construction, and no less senior a figure than Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi presided over the school's inauguration in May 2011. Iran—itsself an ALBA observer nation—is now said to be playing a role in training and indoctrination at the facility.²²

In parallel with its investments in paramilitary infrastructure, Iran has also forged links with an array of radical groups active in the region, either directly or through its main terrorist proxy, Hezbollah. These ties have the potential to significantly augment Iran's capabilities. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper noted in remarks to the Senate in January 2012, Iran's regional alliances "can pose an immediate threat by giving Iran—directly through the IRGC, the Qods force, or its proxies like Hezbollah—a platform in the region to carry out attacks against the United States, our interests, and allies."²³

CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

Iran's historic presence in Latin America dates back to the mid-1980s. During that period, the Islamic Republic assisted Hezbollah in establishing a presence in the so-called "Triple Frontier" that lies at the intersection of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina.²⁴ The decade that followed saw Iran erect an extensive terror support infrastructure throughout South America. As detailed in Argentine federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman's May 2013 report, this network spanned eight countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname) and was made up of intelligence

bases and logistical support centers, enabling Iranian-supported terrorists to subsequently carry out the 1994 AMIA attack.²⁵

Iran's contemporary outreach to the region, however, is comparatively new. It can be said to have begun in earnest in 2005, following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's assumption of the Iranian presidency. Ahmadinejad's radical, revolutionary worldview found a compatible partner in the "21st Century Socialism" promoted by Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez, fostering close personal bonds between the two leaders and strengthening the political ties between Tehran and Caracas. Over time, these commonalities blossomed into a major strategic partnership, encompassing extensive economic contacts, significant defense-industrial cooperation, political coordination on an array of foreign policy issues, and a joint opposition to Western, and specifically American, imperialism.²⁶ In this fashion, Venezuela became Iran's "gateway" into the region, providing material support and safe haven to Iranian irregulars and their proxies, and facilitating the regime's political and economic inroads among an array of other sympathetic regional regimes (chief among them those of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador).²⁷

But this partnership is now in a state of profound flux. The April 2013 death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez following a protracted battle with cancer removed one half of the Iranian regime's most vibrant personal relationship in the region. The end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure as Iran's president in June 2013 has removed the other.

In Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, Hugo Chavez's hand-picked successor as president, is now presiding over an all-out implosion of the national economy, complete with shortages of commodities such as toilet paper, sugar and flour.²⁸ As a result, even though Maduro—who as foreign minister presided over his government's contacts with Iran—is likely to mimic Chavez' sympathetic attitude toward the Islamic Republic, it is far from clear that his regime will have either the political stability or economic solvency to serve as Iran's regional gateway in coming years.

In Iran, too, there is a significant degree of uncertainty relating to the region. It is unclear, at least at this stage, whether incoming Iranian president Hassan Rowhani—who handily won the Islamic Republic's June 14th election—will enjoy similarly close bonds with the "Bolivarian" regimes of Latin America. More significantly, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, has not yet given a clear indication that the region remains a key regime interest. This is salient given that Iran's extensive involvement in the Syrian civil war over the past two years has sapped the regime's economic resources and political capital, diminishing its activism beyond the Middle East in the process. (Iranian officials have taken pains to reaffirm their government's commitment to the region, however; in early July, Ahmadinejad met in Moscow with Bolivian president Evo Morales and assured him that Iran's outreach to Latin America is unwavering, and will be sustained by his successor.²⁹)

As a result, it is possible to envision that Iran's footprint in the region could erode over time. Yet it is far too early to conclude that the Islamic Republic's regional presence is on

the wane—or that Iran no longer constitutes a threat to U.S. regional interests. In fact, along every prong of its outreach to the Americas, the Iranian regime is objectively maintaining, if not expanding, its level of activity. Moreover, a number of political scenarios could afford Iran even greater opportunity to influence regional politics in coming years. These include the potential for a post-Chavez “surge,” as Iranian allies (such as Ecuador’s Correa) ascend to regional leadership roles, or the peace process now underway in Colombia, which could lead to the political rehabilitation of the radical Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), an Iranian ally.

CRAFTING AN AMERICAN RESPONSE

Today, evidence of Iran’s strategic presence in Latin America is so extensive as to be incontrovertible. So, too, are indications that these activities constitute a potential (and in some cases an actual) threat to American security. Yet, to a large extent, this challenge remains poorly understood by the U.S. government as a whole, while the Executive Branch in particular has been hesitant to truly examine and address it.

Thus, the State Department’s June 2013 report on Iranian activities in Latin America, released pursuant to the *Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012*, depicts Iran’s regional presence as one that is in decline, and downplays Iran’s involvement in fomenting instability in the region.³⁰ These conclusions contradict the findings of Argentine state prosecutor Alberto Nisman, whose comprehensive May 2013 report details the existence of an extensive Iranian terror support infrastructure in the region which has been instrumental in facilitating not only the 1994 AMIA attack but more recent plots as well. They also ignore compelling evidence that, to a notable degree, Iran’s regional activities in recent years have targeted the United States. Over the past decade, at least two Iranian-linked terror plots originating in Latin America have targeted the U.S. homeland. The first was the unsuccessful 2007 attempt by Guyanese national Abdul Kadir to blow up fuel tanks at New York’s John F. Kennedy Airport.³¹ The second was an October 2011 plot by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards to assassinate Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Washington, Adel al-Jubeir, at a DC restaurant.³²

These incidents reflect what amounts to a sea change in Iranian strategy. Whereas in the past the Islamic Republic has exhibited an opportunistic approach to Latin America, leveraging its activities in the region when and where possible, Iran’s presence and activities in the regional today are more extensive—and more operational in nature. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper highlighted this shift in his January 2012 testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence when he noted that, in response to the deepening international crisis over their nuclear program, “Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now willing to conduct an attack in the United States.”³³

The broad, multifaceted challenge posed today by Iran in our Hemisphere requires a comprehensive American response capable of addressing Iran’s operations and

capabilities. In particular, U.S. strategy would be well served to focus on three dimensions: legal, economic and intelligence.

- Latin America as a whole is typified by the absence of an overarching approach to terrorism, and much of the region lacks basic legislation criminalizing membership in terrorist groups and providing legal frameworks for their prosecution. A recent research survey conducted by the American Foreign Policy Council found that just eleven countries in all of Latin America have existing laws that make terrorist-related activities a crime under national law.³⁴ Moreover, in many of the places where such laws do exist, terrorism is treated largely as analogous to crime, and in some they have occasionally been used for political purposes (such as in Chile, where there have been incidents of the indigenous Mapuche population being prosecuted under this legislation for basic crimes).

This has allowed terrorist operatives and assorted radicals to exist in a state of legal grace. Legislatively, acts such as money-laundering, narco-trafficking and counterfeiting, which are often employed by terrorist organizations in fundraising, are generally criminalized. However, no corresponding restrictions or penalties exist for participation in extremist organizations *per se*. (A notable example in this regard is the case of Khaled Hussein Ali, a known financier and recruiter for al-Qaeda based in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Despite the publication of an April 2011 exposé in the prominent newsmagazine *Veja* outlining his ties to terror,³⁵ Ali continues to reside in Sao Paulo and operate businesses there.³⁶)

This state of affairs is not permanent, however. Brazil alone is slated to host two major global events in coming years: the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. As a result, there is now greater domestic focus on counterterrorism on the part of the Brazilian government, and at least six separate pieces of counterterrorism-related legislation have been presented to the Brazilian parliament. If passed, these laws would significantly strengthen the legal framework governing counterterrorism in Brazil, and empower greater investigatory and prosecution powers on the part of the country's intelligence and security services. Legal assistance from the U.S. government to appropriate Brazilian government institutions could greatly aid in the establishment and solidification of such counterterrorism authorities. Similar efforts could be employed elsewhere in the region as well, including in Mexico and Colombia.

- In large measure, Iran's economic intrusion into Latin America has taken place on an informal level, embodied by licit and illicit commercial activities in the region's various free trade zones and numerous black markets. Such activities must be addressed through the imposition of stricter counterterrorism regulations—and the active enforcement of anti-money laundering and counterterrorism (AML/CTF) rules now in force in other jurisdictions and regions. Also of concern, however, are Iran's formal trade relations with a number of countries in the region—contacts which could provide Iran with access to the U.S. economy and its operatives with greater mobility in the Americas.

A case in point is Ecuador. Ecuador's membership in OPEC, its participation in the ALBA bloc of nations, its dollarized economy and its lax immigration controls all make it an attractive partner for the Islamic Republic. So, too, does the prominent role that Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa is now seeking to play in the region as a successor to the late Hugo Chavez. Correa has made no secret of his aspirations to regional political leadership, and has promoted himself over competitors such as Bolivia's Evo Morales (whom he has depicted as too backward) and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega (whom he has sought to characterize as too unreliable) as the logical head of ALBA. For these reasons, the Iranian regime is believed to be carrying out illicit financial activities in Ecuador, using banking agreements and bilateral commerce as cover.

The United States, however, has the ability to significantly limit Ecuador's interaction with the Islamic Republic. Strong signals from the U.S. Treasury Department about Iran's exploitation of the Ecuadorian economy, and potential consequences for continuing to provide Iran with such access, could help to significantly limit bilateral economic relations between Tehran and Quito. This is so because the Ecuadorian public is overwhelmingly supportive of the U.S. dollar, and would represent a powerful constituency against cooperation if it felt that its standing vis-à-vis the U.S. economy might be threatened as a result.

- Latin America's favorable geopolitical climate, typified as it is by vast unregulated areas and widespread anti-Americanism, has made it an important focal point of Iran's international activism. So, too, has the region's flourishing informal economy, which affords Iran significant ability to engage in the transshipment and smuggling of contraband. This activity, moreover, is poised to expand significantly.

Specifically, a massive, multi-year expansion of the Panama Canal is now underway. Once completed, it is expected to increase the capacity of the canal from its current volume of four million containers daily to some five times that by the end of 2014. According to Panamanian officials, as much as sixty percent of that cargo will be warehoused, at least temporarily, in the nearby free-trade zone of Colon.³⁷ Notably, there is little indication that Panamanian authorities have a comprehensive strategy to increase screening and customs oversight of the planned expansion of cargo volume. This state of affairs will provide Iran with an attractive transshipment hub for its strategic programs and contraband commerce, and increases the incentives for Iran to expand its presence in adjacent free trade areas (including Colon). Significant efforts must be made by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to strengthen oversight of Canal operations, and to provide Panamanian authorities with timely, actionable intelligence on Iranian shipping activities of concern taking place in the Western Hemisphere.

A GATHERING THREAT

In sum, Iran's presence in Latin America and its partnership with regional radicals represents far more than simply an "axis of annoyance," as some scholars have

contended.³⁸ Rather, Iran's inroads are part of a systematic, long-term strategy on the part of the Islamic Republic to expand its influence and capabilities in the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, irrespective of temporary setbacks, these efforts have steadily expanded in recent years, as the Iranian regime has been progressively squeezed both politically and economically in its immediate periphery.

As Iran's presence in the region continues to grow, so too will its ability to hold at risk America's regional allies, its interests in the Hemisphere, and even the U.S. homeland itself. We ignore this gathering threat at our peril.

NOTES:

¹ See, for example, Ilan Berman, "Assessing Iran's Asia Pivot," *STRATAGEM*, January 2013, <http://www.ilanberman.com/12881/assessing-iran-asia-pivot>.

² "Obama Signs Law against Iran's Influence in Latin America," Agence France Presse, December 29, 2012, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/12/29/obama-signs-law-against-irans-influence-in-latin-america>.

³ Hugh Tomlinson, "Tehran Opens 24-hour News TV," *Times of London*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article3304624.ece>.

⁴ See "Iran Se Escuchara en Espanol con El Canal Hispan TV," *Correo de Orinoco* (Caracas), July 18, 2011, <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/multipolaridad/iran-se-escuchara-espanol-canal-hispan-tv/>. A list of countries where HispanTV is broadcast is available online at <http://hispanTV.com/Distribucion.aspx>. Notably, the United States is among those countries where cable providers both accept and distribute the Iranian channel.

⁵ Ian Black, "Iran to Launch Spanish-Language Television Channel," *Guardian* (London), September 30, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/30/iran-spanish-language-television>; "Iran Launches Spanish TV Channel," Associated Press, January 31, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/31/iran-launches-spanish-tv-channel>.

⁶ Author's interviews, Quito, Ecuador, May 2012.

⁷ Joseph Humire, "Iran's Informal Ambassadors to Latin America," *Fox News Latino*, February 18, 2012, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/02/18/joseph-humire-irans-informal-ambassadors-to-latin-america/>.

⁸ Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Executive Summary: Annual Report on Military Power of Iran," April 2012, <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/dod-iran.pdf>.

⁹ Rex Hudson, *Terror and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America*, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, December 2010, http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf; U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense,

Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran, April 2010,

<http://www.iranwatch.org/government/us-dod-reportmiliarypoweriran-0410.pdf>.

¹⁰ Norman A. Bailey, "Iran's Venezuelan Gateway," American Foreign Policy Council *Iran Strategy Brief* No. 5, <http://www.afpc.org/files/getContentPostAttachment/213>.

¹¹ Figures derived from the International Monetary Fund's *Direction of Trade Statistics* database. (Compilation in author's collection)

¹² "Diplomat Says Tehran Approves Deal to Probe 1994 Argentinian Bombing," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 21, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-argentina-bombing-investigation-truth-commission/24992241.html>.

¹³ Figures derived from the International Monetary Fund's *Direction of Trade Statistics* database. (Compilation in author's collection)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For a more extensive examination of Iranian interests in Brazil, see Ilan Berman, "Why Iran Covets Brazil," *Weekly Standard*, June 20, 2012, http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/why-iran-covets-brazil_647662.html.

¹⁶ Stephen Johnson, *Iran's Influence in the Americas* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 2012), xiv, http://csis.org/files/publication/120312_Johnson_Iran%27sInfluence_web.pdf.

¹⁷ Author's interviews, La Paz and Santa Cruz, Bolivia, January-February 2012.

¹⁸ "Iran 'Partner' in the Industrialization of Bolivia's Lithium Reserves," *Mercopress*, October 30, 2010, <http://en.mercopress.com/2010/10/30/iran-partner-in-the-industrialization-of-bolivia-s-lithium-reserves>.

¹⁹ Author's interviews in Chile, Bolivia and Argentina, January-February 2012.

²⁰ "Gobierno Boliviano Rectifica Hallazgo de Uranio en La Paz," *El Tiempo* (Bogota), August 29, 2012, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12174392>.

²¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran*, April 2010, <http://www.iranwatch.org/government/us-dod-reportmiliarypoweriran-0410.pdf>.

²² Jon B. Purdue, *The War of All the People: The Nexus of Latin American Radicalism and Middle Eastern Terrorism* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012), 154-156.

²³ James Clapper, testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 31, 2012.

²⁴ Rex Hudson, *Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, revised edition December 2010), 5, http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf.

²⁵ Republic of Argentina, Ministerio Publico de la Nacion, "Dictamina," May 29, 2013 (in Spanish). Complete report in author's collection. An English-language summary is available at [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/stuff/uploads/documents/summary_\(31_pages\).pdf](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/stuff/uploads/documents/summary_(31_pages).pdf).

²⁶ For a detailed overview, see Sean Goforth, *Axis of Unity: Venezuela, Iran & the Threat to America* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012).

- ²⁷ Norman A. Bailey, "Iran's Venezuelan Gateway," American Foreign Policy Council *Iran Strategy Brief* No. 5, <http://www.afpc.org/files/getContentPostAttachment/213>.
- ²⁸ See, for example, James Hider, "Toilet Paper Running out as Venezuela's Economy Goes Down The Pan," *Times of London*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/americas/article3766919.ece>.
- ²⁹ "Ahmadinejad Holds Talks with Bolivian President in Moscow," *Tehran Times*, July 1, 2013, <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/108937-ahmadinejad-holds-talks-with-bolivian-president-in-moscow->.
- ³⁰ Guy Taylor, "State Secrets: Kerry's Department Downplays Iran's Role in Latin America; Likely to Anger Congress," *Washington Times*, June 23, 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/23/state-department-downplays-iran-role-in-latin-amer/?page=all>.
- ³¹ Colin Moynihan, "Life Sentence for Leader of Terror Plot at Kennedy," *New York Times*, February 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/nyregion/18plot.html>.
- ³² Charles Savage and Scott Shane, "Iranians Accused of a Plot to Kill Saudis' U.S. Envoy," *New York Times*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/12/us/us-accuses-iranians-of-plotting-to-kill-saudi-envoy.html?pagewanted=all>.
- ³³ James Clapper, testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 31, 2012.
- ³⁴ June 2013 internal study conducted at the direction of the author. (Author's collection)
- ³⁵ Leonardo Coutinho, "A Rede o Terror Finca Bases no Brasil," *Veja* (Sao Paulo), April 6, 2011, 89-96.
- ³⁶ Author's interview, Sao Paulo, Brazil, April-May 2012.
- ³⁷ Author's interviews, Panama City, Panama, May 29-30, 2013.
- ³⁸ See Cynthia J. Arnson, Haleh Esfandiari and Adam Stubits, eds., "Iran in Latin America: Threat or 'Axis of Annoyance'?" Woodrow Wilson Center *Reports on the Americas* no. 23, July 2008, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran_in_LA.pdf.

Threat to the homeland: iran's extending influence in the western hemisphere. Testimony before the House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency. Ilan Berman American Foreign Policy Council. July 9, 2013. Yet Iran's presence in the Americas is arguably more mature than it is elsewhere, owing to the permissive, ideologically-sympathetic environment that prevails throughout much of the region. But Iran's activism also extends to proselytization activities designed to promote its particular brand of political Islam, and ideological coalition-building intended to make the region more inhospitable to the United States than it is currently. Hearing on "Threat to the homeland: iran's extending influence in the western hemisphere". Tuesday, July 9, 2013. 311 Cannon House Office Building Washington D.C. 20515. This research has taken me to 15 countries throughout the Hemisphere on fact-finding trips documenting numerous eyewitness accounts, collecting investigative records of various countries in the region, and analyzing confidential reports produced by sources developed from over a decade of work in Latin America. Most of the information and data collected has been corroborated with open source research and verified by regional and U.S. Government officials as well as subject matter experts. One product of the campaign to transform Iran into a direct threat to the US is the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2013". This was clearly not the answer sought by the act's author, Representative Jeff Duncan, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency within the House Committee on Homeland Security. As Jim Lobe, Washington Bureau Chief for the Inter Press Service, has noted, Duncan "who spoke on a panel on Evangelical Christian support for Israel at AIPAC's annual conference last year" berated the State Department for its conclusions during a July subcommittee hearing indignantly titled "Threat to the Homeland: Iran's Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere". 38 Threat to the Homeland: Iran's Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere: Written Testimony before the H Comm. on Homeland Security 113th Cong. 3 (July 9, 2013) (Written Testimony of Mathew Levitt, Director of Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence). Policymakers have become increasingly concerned with Iran's growing influence and activities in Latin America. 56 Collaboration between Iranian nationals and MDTOs was exemplified by the 2011 Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. 5 7 The foiled plot raised many red flags, and left many governmental agencies wondering about the extent of relations between Iran and MDTOs. Iran has a record of terrorism in our hemisphere. Iran sponsored car bombings in Buenos Aires, Argentina of the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the AMIA Jewish community center in 1994. Iran has also plotted terrorism on American soil, such as the 2007 attempt to blow up the JFK airport in Queens, NY, and the 2011 attempted assassination of the Saudi ambassador in Washington, DC. He emphasized that "Iran's involvement in the Western Hemisphere is a matter for concern." However, Gen. Yet President Obama has done nothing to address this threat, and I am deeply concerned that our nation remains vulnerable. Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published findings of an investigation to examine Iran's threat to the U.S. homeland.