

Radical Islam in Latin America and the Caribbean

Implications for U.S. National Security

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Overview

From 2005 through 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad engaged in a protracted, high-visibility campaign of diplomatic engagement with the states of Latin America and the Caribbean,² generating much discussion in policymaking circles in the United States and in the region regarding the nature of Iran's activities there, as well as the risks posed in the region by other state and non-state actors acting in the name of radical Islam.³

The election of Hassan Rouhani to the Iranian presidency in August 2013 put an end to his predecessor's high-profile diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although since taking office, Rouhani has spoken of his nation's continuing interest in the region,⁴ he has neither visited it,⁵ nor received Latin American and Caribbean heads of state.⁶ Yet it is not clear that Iran's strategic objectives toward the region have fundamentally changed under the nation's new president. In addition, the rise of new actors in the Middle East, such as the well-funded "Islamic State in the Levant" (ISIL), with its global sources of funding and recruitment, makes attention to the activities of both state and non-State Islamic extremists more important than ever.

An unusually large part of what has been published on radical Islamic actors in Latin America and the Caribbean comes from Congressional hearings on the subject, including a July 2011 session of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee for Homeland Security,⁷ the February 16, 2012 hearing by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Global Narcotics Affairs,⁸ and the July 9, 2013 hearing by the House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency.⁹

Beyond such hearings, most of the public works on the topic are relatively recent, and focus on two actors: Iran and the radical Islamic group Hezbollah. The most significant of these include the CSIS study, *Iran in the Americas*,¹⁰ the Wilson Center volume *Iran in the Americas: Threat or Axis of Annoyance?*¹¹ The American Foreign Policy Council's *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America*,¹² the Library of Congress study *Latin America: Terrorism Issues*,¹³ and Sean Gorforth's *Axis of Unity: Venezuela, Iran & the Threat to America*.¹⁴

While at least one work has framed the activities of Hezbollah in the Americas in its broader global context,¹⁵ there is arguably a need for greater attention to the complex interdependence between state groups such as Iran, versus non-state actors in the region, how each relates to the global context which shapes their interests and resources, and how each relates to the Latin America and the Caribbean populations from which radical Muslims are recruited and formed.

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An estimated 1.5 million Muslims live among Latin America and the Caribbean's approximately 600 million inhabitants, with approximately 2/3 of them concentrated in Argentina and Brazil.¹⁶ Although sometimes mistakenly called "turcos" (turks) the region's Muslims are a diverse subset of persons who immigrated from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern countries from the beginning of the 20th Century and before.

This ethnic group, both muslim and non-muslim, is well-established, including some of the most politically and economically successful persons in the region. Indeed eight Latin American and Caribbean heads of state have been of Arabic origin: Antonio Saca (President of El Salvador from 2004 to 2009), Jamil Mahuad (President of Ecuador from August 1998 to January 2000), Carlos Flores (President of Honduras from 1998 to 2002), Carlos Menem (President of Argentina from 1989 to 1999), Abdalá Bucaram (President of Ecuador from August 1996 to February 1997), Jacobo Majluta (President of the Dominican Republic from July to August 1982), Julio Turbay (President of Colombia 1978 to 1982), and Julio Salem (leader of Ecuador May 1944).¹⁷ Other prominent citizens of Middle Eastern ancestry in the region include Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, the actress Salma Hayek, and the pop music star Shakira.

To date, Iran has been the principal, but not the only Middle Eastern state pursuing interests in the region. Other state actors from the region have also played a modest role in the region in the past; Libya, prior to the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, was a significant partner for Bolivia.¹⁸ There is no reason why other Middle Eastern states could not also expand their profile in the region, including Syria, whose current regime has a long working relationship with Hezbollah,¹⁹ currently the most powerful Islamic radical group in Latin America.

Iran's agenda in the region in recent years has generally focused on using sympathetic regimes such as Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Suriname to escape international isolation and circumvent international sanctions, develop missiles and perhaps weapons of mass destruction, and to gain influence within Muslim groups and communities so as to potentially use them for actions against the United States, Jewish, or other Western interests if Iran's regime perceives itself as gravely threatened in the future.²⁰

While Iran seeks to mobilize and influence non-state Islamic actors in the region such as Hezbollah for its own purposes, the interests of such groups and the potential challenges they pose to hemispheric security are not limited solely to Iran's agenda.

The combined challenges of both state and other radical Islamic actors in Latin America and the Caribbean may be grouped into three categories:

- Generation of resources for islamic radicals fighting in other parts of the world;
- Formation of logistics networks for and launching attacks on targets in the Western Hemisphere; and
- Collaboration between radical Islamic actors and Latin American allies in evading international controls and developing weapons.

Generation of resources for Islamic radicals fighting in other parts of the world.

Within the Islamic faith, the tradition of religious charity (zakat)²¹ dictates that faithful Muslims donate a portion of their earnings to help the needy. As with the Christian practice of tithing, the level of zakat among Muslims is subject to varying interpretations by Islamic scholars, and is not universally practiced (either in Latin America or elsewhere). Nonetheless, this religious obligation, combined with the sending of remittances from the region to families in the Middle East, plus donations in support of causes such as "Palestine," puts tens of millions of dollars or more in motion annually from Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the overwhelming majority of such funds are spent for legitimate charity, and not terrorism, a portion

does find its way into the hands of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda,²² and now possibly ISIL.²³

While the majority of such earnings come from legitimate sources, Muslims in the region also play important roles in some of Latin America and the Caribbean's most infamous hubs of illicit activity.²⁴ Examples include the Tri-Border area between Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina,²⁵ the Tacna-Ilo corridor (Peru), Maicao (Colombia), Colon (Panama) and increasing, Margarita Island (Venezuela).²⁶

A portion of the region's narcotraffickers and other organized crime figures have also been Muslims,²⁷ including Chekry Harb and Ayman Joumaa, whose activities were exposed in 2008 by "Operation Titan." Harb was a narcotics trafficker of Lebanese descent whose network in the region included Colombian cartels, paramilitary groups and Hezbollah, and who allegedly paid 12% of his proceeds to the latter.²⁸ Joumaa laundered money for the Mexican cartel Los Zetas through the Lebanese-Canadian Bank and was similarly believed to have donated part of his earnings to Hezbollah.²⁹

Because of the demands that Hezbollah currently faces to support the Palestinian cause in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, maintain its position in Lebanon, and also the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria,³⁰ experts believe that the organization could expand its use of such illicit activities for fundraising in the near future.³¹

Formation of logistics networks for and launching attacks on targets in the hemisphere

To date, there have been a moderate number of cases of radical Islamic actors planning, preparing for and conducting attacks against U.S. and other Western targets from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The two best known examples occurred in Argentina: In March 1992 a suicide attack against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires killed 29, and the July 1994, 85 were killed in a truck bomb against the Jewish community center (AMIA) there. Hezbollah and Iran have been implicated in both attacks.³²

Beyond Argentina, in 2007, Islamic radicals including Abdul Kadir, an afro-muslim political activist and former mayor of Linden, Guyana, his Guyanese compatriot Abdel Nurwere, and Kareem Ibrahim, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, were arrested for planning an attack against the John F. Kennedy international airport in New York City.³³

In October 2011, Iranian-American businessman Manssor Arbabsiar, and Gholam Shakuri of the Iranian Qods force, was caught in a DEA sting operation trying to contract the Mexican cartel Los Zetas to kill the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Washington DC.³⁴

In December of the same year the Spanish-language television station Univision exposed a plot involving Iranian diplomats in Mexico City coordinating with students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) to launch cyber-attacks and cyber-espionage against U.S. targets.³⁵

In October 2014, Peruvian authorities arrested Muamad Amadar, a Lebanese Hezbollah operative, in the Lima suburb of Surquillo, on evidence that he was stockpiling explosives in his apartment for use against targets in the country.³⁶

As noted previously, such activities have consistently been facilitated by state actors such as Iran. In the case of the plot against the Saudi ambassador in Washington D.C., Iran deposited \$100,000 in the account of the person it believed represented Los Zetas, and planned to provide a total of \$1.5 million to carry out the operation.³⁷

Iranian embassies in the region, and their personnel, have played a key role in these activities.

The most prominent example is Mohsen Rabbani, who served as an accredited Iranian cultural attaché in Buenos Aires, and who was implicated by the official report of Argentine special prosecutor Alberto Nisman of recruiting and managing agents in the region, as well as for his

leading role in the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish community center.³⁸ In the case of the cyber-attack, the head of the UNAM computer sciences department who recruited the students allegedly took them to the Iranian embassy in Mexico City to present their proposal and seek resources to conduct the operation.³⁹

One of the principal activities of Iranian personnel in the region is constructing networks, and by extension, building influence within the region's Islamic organizations. One important vehicle for doing so is through recruitment of both adults and Latin American youth, to include trips to Iran for religious indoctrination and training.⁴⁰ Overall, across Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 1,000 Latin Americans may have traveled to religious sites in Iran such as Qom for such training since 2008 alone.⁴¹ Over time, persons recruited and indoctrinated by Iran have, themselves, become recruiters and agents for Iran. Examples include Suhail Assad and Karim Abdul Paz, both Argentine-born disciples of Moshen Rabbani.⁴²

Beyond recruitment, network building activities also include proselyting indigenous communities such as the Wayuu in the Guajira region between Colombia and Venezuela, the Aymara in the Bolivian province of Chapare,⁴³ indigenous groups in Chiapas,⁴⁴ and other vulnerable populations, although scale of such efforts in the region appear limited.⁴⁵

The compliment to extra-regional state actors such as Iran in constructing radical Islamic networks is receptive governments in the region offering active assistance, or at least a permissive environment, for such activities.

The governments of Venezuela,⁴⁶ Suriname,⁴⁷ St. Kitts and Nevis,⁴⁸ for example, been implicated in issuing false passports and other identity documents to Islamic radicals, making it more difficult for international law enforcement to follow their movements.

Many of the eleven ALBA member states offer a relative base from which radical Muslims can conduct operations across the region. The Center for Iranian-Latin American Cultural Exchange in Caracas, Venezuela, for example, allegedly served as a base for Islamic radicals such as Abdul Karim Paz to travel around the region, recruiting and coordinating with others into his network.⁴⁹ Bolivia's Chapare province is another area in which Islamic groups such as Hezbollah are believed to operate and coordinate with other Latin American criminal organizations with relative impunity.⁵⁰

ALBA governments have also supported Islamic networks by working to construct a sense of shared purpose with their own leftist supporters. The late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez, for example, promoted the work of Spanish Marxist Jorge Verstrynge within the Venezuelan armed forces.⁵¹ Verstrynge's book, *Wars of the Periphery and Radical Islam*, argues that revolutionary socialist movements, such as those of Latin America, should learn from the ethic of all-encompassing struggle and sacrifice manifested by the fighters of Revolutionary Islam.⁵² Similarly, Bolivia sought to involve Iran's in the development of doctrine and training for the ALBA Defense Academy, established in Santa Cruz in May 2011.⁵³

Beyond ALBA, the construction of Islamic networks in the region has been aided by a semi-permissive environment and facilitators. An article in *Veja* magazine argues that Islamic extremists have operated in parts of Brazil for years.⁵⁴ In Peru, the socialist leader of the "House of ALBA," Eduard Quiroga, reportedly played a major role in recruiting Peruvian youth for religious indoctrination in Iran.⁵⁵

Finally, non-state criminal actors at times play an important role in augmenting the capabilities and networks of radical Islamic groups in the region. In Central America, for example, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) street gang is believed to have negotiated with Al Qaeda to smuggle its operatives into the United States for pay,⁵⁶ with senior Al Qaeda operative Adnan G. El Shukrijumah having met with MS-13 leaders in Honduras in July 2004 and perhaps on other occasions.⁵⁷

Collaboration between radical Islamic actors and Latin American allies in evading international controls and developing weapons.

In recent years, non-state radical Islamic actors and internationally sanctioned regimes such as Iran have expanded collaboration with sympathetic partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the ALBA states, to circumvent international financial and other controls, and to pursue portions of the development of missiles and weapons of mass destruction on Latin American soil.

As examples on the financial side, Venezuela and Ecuador appear to have helped Iran to evade financial sanctions and launder money.⁵⁸ Vehicles for doing so have included the Al Taqwa bank in the Bahamas, the Iran-Venezuela Bi-national fund (established in April 2008),⁵⁹ the International Development Bank (IDB) in Venezuela,⁶⁰ and COFIEC in Ecuador. Prior to 2001, the Muslim Brotherhood and al Qaeda allegedly used the Al Taqwa Bank for money laundering, although after the events of September 11, much of this network was shut down.⁶¹ The IDB⁶² in Venezuela was sanctioned in October 2008 by the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) for ties with the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) and the Iranian Ministry of Defense.⁶³ COFIEC in Ecuador has similarly come under scrutiny for accepting deposits from the sanctioned Iranian bank EDBI.⁶⁴

Beyond banking, analysts believe that Iranian commercial joint ventures with the countries of ALBA may serve as a front for the import of components for missiles, missile fuel, or weapons of mass destruction.⁶⁵ The Venezuelan military industry company CAVIM has been sanctioned for supplying technology to Iran.⁶⁶ Venezuelan joint ventures in the state of Aragua include the Iranian firms Parchin Chemical Industries, which has been tied to Iran's missile program, as well as Kimiaa Sanat, Co., an affiliate of Qods Aviation in Venezuela, listed under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747 as "an entity of concern for WMD related procurement."⁶⁷ Other Venezuelan-Iranian joint manufacturing facilities such as the *Venir* auto factory are believed to play a similar role, since the wide and technically obscure array of components that they import for vehicle production can be used as cover to smuggle missile components and other materials into Venezuela.

On the other hand, although analyses of Iranian activities in the Americas also regularly mention the country's interest in acquiring uranium from states such as Venezuela,⁶⁸ Ecuador,⁶⁹ and Bolivia,⁷⁰ the logic of transporting such bulk material from Latin America to the Middle East is unclear when Iran itself has ample deposits of uranium on its own soil.⁷¹

Recommendations

The challenge posed to the U.S. and regional security by radical Islamic groups operating in Latin America and the Caribbean requires a sustained, well-crafted response which includes partner nations within the Western Hemisphere and in the broader international community, and which takes a "whole-of-government" approach.

While the U.S. State Department was mandated to develop a strategy in December 2012 for "Countering Iran in the Americas,"⁷² the U.S. General Accounting Office has questioned the implementation of the strategy advanced by the State Department in response to the legislation.⁷³ Moreover, the focus mandated by the Act was arguably too narrow, concentrating on Iran and groups tied to it, rather than the broader challenge of state and non-state radical Islamic actors in the region, and by mentioning in only a brief and non-specific fashion, coordination with international partners.⁷⁴

Building on the work by the State Department and other organizations done to date, the approach advocated by this work should include not just an analysis of Iranian and Hezbollah activities, but how the challenge presented by the broader array of state and non-state actors affiliated with radical Islam in the region may be understood and managed. Such an analysis should

explicitly link the challenges presented by such actors in the Western Hemisphere to their evolving activities and interests globally, including how their interests and capabilities might change, and what they in Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of a “war” with the U.S. or other Western actors in other parts of the world.

Such analysis should also include the potential role of non-Islamic states such as Russia or China, which could play a constructive role in combatting radical Islam where it threatens their own interests, but which might also benefit strategically from encouraging it in the Western Hemisphere, since such a challenge could potentially distract the U.S. and force it to divert attention and resources from other parts of the world.

A credible analysis will also require better knowledge of facts regarding the magnitude and sources of the challenge, including the quantity of money that flows from Latin America and the Caribbean to terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, or the number of youth from the region who have traveled to Iran for indoctrination, and from where.

Informed by such analysis, the approach taken should reflect consideration of a broad array of possible scenarios regarding future events in both the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean, including the future status of ALBA governments and their willingness to cooperate with international legal frameworks, and alternatively, to collaborate with rogue states and Islamic radical groups. The approach should also, however, emphasize certain common elements:

On one hand, any solution must be of the level and effectiveness of law enforcement cooperation across the region to combat issues such as terrorist finance, contraband and the movement of personnel. While technology should play a role, improved intelligence sharing and international legal frameworks for collaborating against bad actors is also important.⁷⁵

Particular attention should also be given to the role of the ALBA regimes in creating “gateways” into the region for such states and groups, and working with the international community to impose consequences where such regimes permit sanctioned states to evade international controls and develop weapons on their territory, or help to provide false documents and sanctuary for those planning terrorist acts.

Such collaboration notwithstanding, the approach should include the identification and possible U.S. responses to critical events, such as the imminent acquisition of weapons of mass destruction or delivery systems, or the imminent launch of a major terrorist act by groups harbored in a state unwilling to cooperate with the United States, such as Venezuela, or with severe internal governance issues that prevents its leadership from responding or consenting to allow others to help it address the international threat presented from its territory. More specifically, the U.S. should carefully consider now under what circumstances it would intervene in such a situation, preferably coordinating with partner nations, and how it would manage the international concerns and pushback that such an intervention would generate.

Finally, particular care should be taken to work with communities of Middle Eastern origin and the peaceful, law-abiding majority of Muslims in the region to develop an approach that involves them as well in countering terrorism, the radicalization of their communities, and aggression from extra-hemispheric actors. A solution that is seen in the region as a U.S.-led “crusade” against Muslims or persons of Middle Eastern origin must be avoided *at all cost*.

Role for US military forces

The preliminary analysis presented this work suggests that the appropriate roles for U.S. military forces in combating the challenge of radical Islamic actors in Latin America and the Caribbean is likely to be limited in both circumstances, and the size of the force required.

In general, the greatest needs in combatting Islamic radicals in the region will not be military action, but law enforcement and intelligence collaboration, including identifying and cutting off illicit financial flows to both potential terrorists and other criminal groups, as well as in helping

states assert greater control over borders and track flows of goods and persons. Such needs will inherently point to State Department-led programs, such as those for enhancing banking regulations, export controls, and more effective judicial systems.

In the military domain, special operations forces may be required to conduct missions in niche areas, always in coordination with partner nations. U.S. mobility assets, logistics and engineering support, or technology may similarly play a role in helping partner nation law enforcement and military exert more effective control over weakly governed areas in their national territory.

While a large-scale U.S. military operation to prevent the deployment or use of weapons of mass destruction in the region by radical Islamic actors should not be ruled out, the employment of U.S. ground forces in the region will generally be a sub-optimal option, since doing so would likely further radicalize Muslim populations both in and beyond the region, while creating political strain with U.S. allies, and generating a rallying point for those who oppose the U.S. in general.

Conclusions

This work has argued that the potential threat presented to the security of the U.S. and the Western Hemisphere from radical Islamic actors is serious and requires sustained attention from leaders in the region.

The challenge goes beyond the question of Iranian activities in the Americas to include non-state Islamic actors such as Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and potentially ISIL, plus other state actors, including non-Islamic U.S. geopolitical rivals such as Russia and China, who might benefit strategically from a U.S. distracted by a radical Islamic threat in the Western hemisphere. While terrorist attacks from the region and the development of weapons of mass destruction are part of the challenge, illicit and other financing from the region of terrorism globally should not be ignored.

To address the problem, the U.S. requires a strategic plan, coordinated across U.S. government agencies and international partners, which considers the diverse array of scenarios in which the activities of Islamic radicals may pose a threat. While the U.S. military will not play the lead role in such a strategy, it will be a necessary cornerstone for the effectiveness of such a strategy, as the U.S. works with its partners to build a region that is prosperous and secure from radicalism for persons of all religious faiths and political persuasions. □

Notes

1. Dr. R. Evan Ellis is Research Professor of Latin American Studies with the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. The views expressed in this work are solely his own and do not necessarily represent his institution or the U.S. Government.

2. For the argument that Iran's attention to Latin America was a policy position of the Ahmadinejad regime, see Farideh Farhi, "Tehran's Perspective on Iran-Latin American Relations," In Cynthia Aranson, *Iran in the Americas: Threat or Axis of Annoyance?* ed. Cynthia Aranson, Haleh Esfandairi and Adam Stubits, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013), pp. 25-34.

3. Within the U.S., such attention was illustrated by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's public warning to the states of the region regarding the dangers posed by ties with Iran, as well as multiple congressional hearings on the subject, and the passage of the December 2012 "Countering Iran in the Americas Act" by the U.S. Congress. See Charley Keys, "Clinton warns of Iranian, Chinese gains in Latin America," *CNN*, May 1, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/01/clinton.latin.america/index.html>.

4. Ely Karmon, "Iran in America Latina - La era del Presidente Rouhani," *DEF*, October 2012.

5. Rouhani reportedly planned to visit the G-77 summit in Bolivia in June 2014, but pulled out at the last minute, sending his Vice-President instead. See "Iranian president to attend G-77 summit in Bolivia," *Press TV*, May 18, 2014, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/05/18/363104/rouhani-to-visit-bolivia-for-g77-summit/>.

6. Nor is the absence of Latin American leaders from Iran due to a lack of interest on their part in visiting. Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro, for example, dropped hints during Rouhani's inauguration of his interest in visiting the

country. See “Maduro dice que alianza de Venezuela e Irán se profundizará con Rohaní,” *El Nacional*, July 20, 2013, http://www.el-nacional.com/mundo/Maduro-Venezuela-Iran-profundizara-Rohani_0_212379014.html.

7. “Hezbollah in Latin America - Implications for U.S. Homeland Security,” Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, July 7, 2011, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg72255/pdf/CHRG-112shrg72255.pdf>.

8. “Iran’s Influence and Activity in Latin America,” Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Global Narcotics Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, February 16, 2012, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg73922/pdf/CHRG-112shrg73922.pdf>.

9. “Threat to the Homeland: Iran’s Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere,” Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives, 113th Congress, 1st Session, Serial No. 113-24, July 9, 2013, <http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-threat-homeland-iran%E2%80%99s-extending-influence-western-hemisphere>.

10. Steven Johnson, *Iran’s Influence in the Americas*, (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2012). http://csis.org/files/publication/120312_Johnson_Iran%27sInfluence_web.pdf.

11. Cynthia Aranson, *Iran in the Americas: Threat or Axis of Annoyance?* ed. Cynthia Aranson, Haleh Esfandairi and Adam Stubits, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran_in_LA.pdf.

12. Ian Berman and Joseph M. Humire, *Iran’s Strategic Penetration of Latin America*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

13. Mark P. Sullivan, *Latin America: Terrorism Issues*, 7-5700, RS20149, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 2, 2012).

14. Sean Goforth, *Axis of Unity: Venezuela, Iran & the Threat to America*, (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012).

15. See, for example, Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013). See also Steven O’Hearn, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps*, (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012).

16. Blaise Misztal, “Threat to the Homeland: Iran’s Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere,” Testimony to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, July 9, 2013, <http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-threat-homeland-iran%E2%80%99s-extending-influence-western-hemisphere>.

17. See “Did you know? Latin America has had 8 presidents of Arab origin,” *NGC Blog*, March 22, 2013, <http://ngcco.wordpress.com/2013/03/22/did-you-know-latin-america-has-had-8-presidents-of-arab-origin/>.

18. “Bolivia’s Morales visit Libya and Iran for energy cooperation,” *Mercopress*, September 1, 2008, <http://en.mercopress.com/2008/09/01/bolivia-s-morales-visit-libya-and-iran-for-energy-cooperation>.

19. See, for example, Marius Deeb, *Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah: The Unholy Alliance and Its War on Lebanon* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013).

20. According to Iran’s own military leadership, asymmetric warfare is a key part of the nation’s military doctrine. In the words of Iranian Brigadier General Attaollah Salehi, “All divisions of the Islamic Republic’s military pay close attention to events in neighboring states and incorporate these into their asymmetric warfare training.” Joseph M. Humire, “Threat to the Homeland: Iran’s Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere,” Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, July 9, 2013, <http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-threat-homeland-iran%E2%80%99s-extending-influence-western-hemisphere>.

21. The term refers to obligatory giving of alms, the taxation of the income and wealth of a Muslim, and is one of five pillars of the Islamic faith.

22. In March 2013, head of U.S. Southern Command, General John Kelly testified to Congress that the activities of the Lebanese Shiite community in the region were believed to generate tens of millions of dollars for the group Hezbollah alone. “Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 113th Congress,” House Armed Services Committee, March 20, 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20140226/101782/HHRG-113-AS00-Wstate-KellyUSMCJ-20140226.pdf>.

23. Experts interviewed for this study argue that the dominance of the Shiite Hezbollah organization among those who support radical Islamic causes in the region means that the radical Sunni movement ISIL has limited support within Latin America and the Caribbean, even though Sunnis outnumber Shiite Muslims in the region overall.

24. A March 2010 report by the London-based Financial Action Task Force argued that such free trade zones appear to be particularly vulnerable to activities such as money laundering and terrorist finance. See Financial Action Task Force (FATF), “Money laundering vulnerabilities of Free Trade Zones,” March 2010, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/ML%20vulnerabilities%20of%20Free%20Trade%20Zones.pdf>.

25. Hugo Alconada Mon writes “For years, the region has been the epicenter of operations for money laundering and for narcotics, arms and human trafficking, making the region a matter of continuing concern for Washington.” See Hugo Alconada Mon, “The Shadow of Iran in Argentina takes on a Suspicious Shape,” In Cynthia Aranson, *Iran in the Americas: Threat or Axis of Annoyance?* ed. Cynthia Aranson, Haleh Esfandairi and Adam Stubits, (Washington D.C.: Wood-

row Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013). p. 51. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran_in_LA.pdf.

26. Humire, "Threat to the Homeland..."

27. Doug Farah, a leading scholar on Islamic radicalism in the Americas, argues that Islamic groups are currently very active in the cocaine trade, with greater access in the region due to allies such as Venezuela. Arthur Brice, "Iran, Hezbollah mine Latin America for revenue, recruits, analysts say," *CNN*, June 3, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/03/world/americas/iran-latin-america/index.html>.

28. For a good discussion of the case, see Stephen Dudley, "Terrorism and Crime in the Americas – 'It's Business,'" *Insight Crime*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/terrorism-and-crime-in-the-americas-its-business>.

29. The link was uncovered in "Operation Titan" in which the U.S. and Colombia collaborated to move against one such network operating in the region in 2008. See Jason Ryan, "Lebanese Drug Lord Charged in US: Links to Zetas and Hezbollah," *ABC News*, December 13, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/lebanese-drug-lord-charged-in-us-links-to-zetas-and-hezbollah/>. See also Douglas Farah, Testimony, Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, July 9, 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM09/20130709/101046/HHRG-113-HM09-Wstate-FarahD-20130709.pdf>.

30. Although contradictory, some of the same Palestinians that Hezbollah has supported in the West Bank and Gaza are currently fighting against the Assad regime (which Hezbollah supports) in Syria.

31. See also Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah's Syria Problem," *Politico*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/12/hezbollah-syria-13238.html#VKMFL8B0Mg>.

32. The most complete and detailed report regarding the Iran's role in the attack and other incidents of terrorism in the Americas is the report by Argentine prosecutor Alberto Nisman. A detailed summary of his report can be found at [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/stuff/uploads/documents/summary_\(31_pages\).pdf](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/stuff/uploads/documents/summary_(31_pages).pdf). See also Simon Romero, "Prosecutor in Argentina Sees Iran Plot," *New York Times*, May 30, 2013. p. A4.

33. The concept for the attack involved blowing up fuel tanks and setting off a chain of explosions under the airport. See G. Sulzburger, "2 men convicted in Kennedy Airport Plot," *New York Times*, August 3, 2010, p. A1. See also Farah, Testimony...

34. Ewen McAskill, "Iranians charged in US over plot to assassinate Saudi ambassador," *The Guardian*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/11/iranians-charged-us-assassination-plot>. See also Benjamin Weiser, "Man Sentenced in Plot to Kill Saudi Ambassador," *New York Times*, May 30, 2013. See also Dudley.

35. "La amenaza Iraní," *Univision*, December 9, 2011, <http://noticias.univision.com/article/786870/2011-12-09/documentales/la-amenaza-irani/la-amenaza-irani>.

36. Cecelia Valenzuela, "Terrorismo sin fronteras," *El Comercio*, September 29, 2014, <http://elcomercio.pe/opinion/columnistas/terrorismo-sin-fronteras-cecilia-valenzuela-noticia-1767395>. See also "Presunto miembro de Hezbolá fue detenido en Surquillo," *El Comercio*, Lima, Peru, October 28, 2014, http://elcomercio.pe/lima/ciudad/presunto-terrorista-hezbola-fue-detenido-surquillo-noticia-1767375?ref=nota_lima&ft=mod_leatambien&e=titulo.

37. Charlie 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&r=0>.

38. Matthew Levitt, Testimony, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, and the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, August 1, 2013, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/joint-subcommittee-hearing-examining-state-department%E2%80%99s-report-iranian-presence-western>.

39. "La Amenaza Irani."

40. Joby Warrick, "With lure of religion classes, Iran seeks to recruit Latin Americans," *Washington Post*, August 10, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/with-lure-of-religion-classes-iran-seeks-to-recruit-latin-americans/2013/08/10/8e3592c6-f626-11e2-9434-60440856fadf_story.html.

41. Interview with Doug Farah, Washington D.C., December 29, 2014. Farah points out, however, that precise number are not known, with many such recruits traveling through Venezuela and Cuba without receiving a stamp for Iran on their passports. See also Doug Farah, Testimony. See also Warrick.

42. Joseph M. 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/>.

43. Indeed, such proselyting reportedly includes an Aymara language version of the Holy Koran. Interview with Doug Farah, Washington D.C., December 29, 2014.

44. Indeed, at the time of this writing, Mohamed Bakar, the brother of Moshen Rabbani, arguably Iran's leading agent in Latin America, was believed to be in Chiapas. Interview with Joseph Humire, Washington D.C., December 29, 2014.

45. See, for example, the website for the "Islamic autonomy" of the Wayuu people, <http://autonomiaislamicawayuu.blogspot.com/>, accessed December 22, 2014.

46. One report notes that the Venezuelan government has issued false Venezuelan identity documents to an estimated 173 persons of Middle Eastern origin, helping them to conceal their identities as they move through Latin America. See Victoria L. Henderson, Joseph M. Humire, and Fernando D. Menendez, "Canada on Guard: Assessing the Immigration Threat of Iran, Venezuela and Cuba," *Center for a Secure Free Society*, June 2014. http://www.securefreesociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/CANADA_ON_GUARD_JUNE_20143.pdf.

47. In November 2013, for example, Dino Bouterse, son of the President of Suriname, was arrested in a sting operation in Panama in which he offered to sell persons he believed to be agents of Hezbollah false passports, as well as weapons and cocaine. See "Suriname president's son on US terror charges," *BBC News*, November 8, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24875963>.

48. "Three Iranians with St.Kitts-Nevis Passports at center of U.S. Department of Treasury investigations," *CNN*, March 26, 2014, <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-1112892>.

49. Humire, "Threat to the Homeland..."

50. "Bolivia: Narcos y cocaleros destruyen el Chapare – EJU.TV," *Hacer*, November 15, 2010, <http://www.hacer.org/latam/bolivia-narcos-y-cocaleros-destruyen-el-chapare-eju-tv/>.

51. Verstryngue was invited to be the keynote speaker at a 2005 military conference in Caracas on non-traditional warfare, and his book was made required reading for senior Venezuelan military officers. See Humire, "Threat to the Homeland..." See also John Sweeney, "Jorge Verstryngue: The Guru of Bolivarian Asymmetric Warfare," *VCrisis*, September 9, 2005, <http://www.vcrisis.com/index.php?content=letters/200509091152>.

52. Jorge Verstryngue, *La Guerra Periférico y el Islam Revolucionario: Orígenes, Reglas y Ética de la Guerra Asimétrica* (Barcelona: El Viejo Topo, 2005).

53. Iran reportedly donated \$1.2 million to build the academy, and Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi visited Bolivia to preside over its inauguration. See John B. Purdue, *The War of All the People: The Nexus of Latin American Radicalism and Middle Eastern Terrorism*, (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012).

54. Reinaldo Azevedo, Blog, *Veja*, April 18, 2011, <http://veja.abril.com.br/blog/reinaldo/geral/acordem-senhores-congressistas-ja-o-governo-nao-da-bola-terrorista-alicia-homens-pobres-do-interior-do-brasil-para-fazer-%E2%80%9Ccurso-de-religiao%E2%80%9D-no-ira/comment-page-2/>.

55. Anonymous interview. Washington D.C. December 2014.

56. The most extensive argument for the link between the two organizations is presented by P. Williams in his book *The Al Qaeda connection: International terrorism, organized crime, and the coming apocalypse* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005).

57. "Out of the Underworld," *The Economist*, January 5, 2006, <http://www.economist.com/node/5354677>. See also Hitha Prabhakar, "From Prison to Gangs to the World's Most Notorious Terrorist Group," *Financial Times*, December 8, 2011, <http://www.ftpress.com/articles/article.aspx?p=1768313&seqNum=5>. El Shukrijumah and other Al Qaeda operatives have been reported in Central America on other occasions as well. See "Terroristas Islamistas Estarian en Honduras," *La Prensa*, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, May 27, 2011. <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/541621-97/terroristas-islamistas-estarian-en-honduras>.

58. See, for example, Norman A. Bailey, "Iran's Venezuelan Gateway," *American Foreign Policy Council*, Iran Strategy Brief, No. 5, <http://www.afpc.org/files/getContentPostAttachment/2013>.

59. "Iran-Venezuela ties serve strategic aims," *UPI*, August 14, 2009, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2009/08/14/Iran-Venezuela-ties-serve-strategic-aims/91201250266165/.

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61. Mark Hosenball, "Attacking the Money Machine," *NBC News*, November 7, 2011, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3067473/t/attacking-money-machine/#.VKMxJGc5Bjo>.

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63. Robert M. Morgenthau, "The Emerging Axis of Iran and Venezuela," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2009, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203440104574400792835972018>.

64. "Restricciones, amenazas y diligencias por información sobre Cofiec e Irán," *El Universo*, September 22, 2012, <http://www.eluniverso.com/2012/09/22/1/1355/restricciones-amenazas-diligencias-informacion-sobre-coficie-iran.html>. See also Douglas Farah and Pamela Philips Lum, "Ecuador's Role in Iran's Latin American Financial Structure," *International Assessment and Strategy Center*, March 2013. http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.304/pub_detail.asp.

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66. "Washington sanciona a Cavim por venta de tecnología a Irán," *El Universal*, February 11, 2013, <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/130211/washington-sanciona-a-cavim-por-venta-de-tecnologia-a-iran>.

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68. See Morgenthau, "The Link between Iran and Venezuela..."

69. See, for example, “Secret document: Venezuela, Bolivia supplying Iran with uranium,” *Haaretz*, May 25, 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/secret-document-venezuela-bolivia-supplying-iran-with-uranium-1.276675>.

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71. See, for example, “Iran Says It Has Found New Deposits of Uranium,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/world/middleeast/iran-says-it-has-found-new-uranium-deposits.html?_r=0.

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73. See “Combating Terrorism: Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address,” GAO-14-834, (Washington D.C.: Government Accountability Office, September 2014).

74. “Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012,” H.R. 3783, 112th Congress, 2nd Session, January 3, 2012, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr3783enr/pdf/BILLS-112hr3783enr.pdf>.

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