

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA

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Iranian Foreign Policy toward Latin America

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ABSTRACT

Iran's relationships with Latin America and the engagement style it has developed has created a lot of controversies, especially in the West. The purpose of this study is to draw a diagram of the relations Iran has established with the continent and to explain the nature of relations in terms of content. Relations that started in the period of Ahmadinejad and soared rapidly experienced a slowdown period later. The main problem for Iran, which is moving to revitalize relations with the continent after 2015, is rather whether it can expand its field of legitimacy or not. In Latin America, which has recently undergone politically a transformation from left politics to right politics, how the political powers will enter into relation with Iran will largely be shaped through (i) Iran's relations with the West and (ii) Tehran's relationship with the continent.

Keywords: Iran, Latin America, Anti-Westernism, Oil, Shiism

ÖZET

İran'ın Latin Amerika ile ilişkileri ve geliştirdiği angajman tarzı özellikle batıda bir çok açıdan tartışma yaratmıştı. Bu çalışmanın amacı İran'ın kıta ile kurduğu ilişkilerin bir şemasını çıkarıp, içerik anlamında ilişkilerin doğasını izah etmektir. Ahmedinejad döneminde başlayan ve hızlı bir şekilde yükselen ilişkiler daha sonra bir tür yavaşlama dönemine girmiştir. 2015 sonrasında kıta ile ilişkileri yeniden canlandırma amacıyla hareket eden İran için asıl sorun kıtada daha çok meşruiyet alanını genişletip genişletememesidir. Son dönemde siyasal anlamda sol siyasetten sağ siyasete doğru bir dönüşüm yaşayan Latin Amerika'da siyasal iktidarların İran ile nasıl bir ilişkiye gireceği büyük oranda (i) İran'ın batı ile olan ilişkileri ve (ii) Tahran'ın kıta ile kuracağı ilişki tarzı üzerinden şekillenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Latin Amerika, Batı-karşıtlığı, Petrol, Şiilik.

خلاصه

روابط ایران با آمریکای لاتین و نحوه تعاملش با این کشورها از نقطه نظرهای مختلف بحثهای زیادی را به ویژه در غرب موجب شده است. هدف از این پژوهش تهیه یک نقشه از روابط ایران با این قاره و واکاوی ماهیت این روابط متقابل می باشد. روابط ایران با کشورهای آمریکای لاتین که در دوران احمدی نژاد به سرعت رو به گسترش نهاده بود، در مراحل بعدی به نوعی وارد دوره ای از رکود گردید. از سال ۱۳۹۳ به بعد ایران در تلاش برای احیای این روابط بوده است. در این مرحله، مسأله اصلی برای ایران امکان و یا عدم امکان گسترش حوزه مشروعیتش در این قاره است. اخیراً دولتهای آمریکای لاتین از لحاظ سیاسی چرخشی از چپ به راست را شاهد بوده اند. نحوه شکل گیری روابط این دولتها با ایران تا حد زیادی به روابط ایران با غرب و شیوه برقراری روابط از طرف ایران با این کشورها بستگی خواهد داشت. کلمه های کلیدی: ایران، آمریکای لاتین، غرب ستیزی، نفت، تشیع.

Introduction

On August 2016, Muhammad Javad Zarif's official visit to six Latin American countries, accompanied by a large group of businessmen, has curiously revitalized the discussions and considerations in various circles that focus on the relations between Iran and Latin America. While one of the most prominent Spanish newspapers opted to perceive this as a "problematical visit" (*Visita Problematica*),¹ the American media and think tanks chose to focus on what the visit means for the United States and the region at large.² The real reason behind the broad repercussion of Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs visit to Latin America in the Western media is the enduring "suspicious" and "dangerous" outlook toward Iran. Having pursued an intensely proactive policy toward Latin America, particularly during the term of Ahmadinejad, Iran has sought to eliminate the embargo and security threats directed at itself in its vicinity.



In addition to the periodization of the relations between Iran and Latin America up until today, this study aims to provide a perspective on the nature, content and the sustainability of the relations. While Iran is pursuing a serious balance in relations with the Latin American countries, it has left the position of an "urgency" in building relations and has been involved in an effort of settling the relations on normalized grounds. Regardless of the depth of the relations between the two parties, numerous people, groups and even states in the region hold a suspicious position vis-a-vis of the relations with Iran; the

most vital issue for Iran is its struggle to expand its domain of legitimacy in the region. Particularly, after 2015, when the left-wing governments in Latin America have left slowly their seats to the right-wing governments, the Iranian style of building relations, transparency and the nature of Tehran's relations with the West will be the main determinants of Iran's relations with Latin America.

The History of the Relations Between Iran and Latin America

If we do not take into account the relations between the two parties, that remained at the level of diplomatic kindness prior to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, Latin America has never been a top priority for Iranian foreign policy. Keeping tight relations with the United States and approaching Latin America in this framework has constituted the mere essence of Iranian policy toward Latin America before 1979. The initial ties between Iran and the region were initiated with the appointment of Henri Enthoven- a Belgian national who lived in Argentina at the time- as the honorary consul in 1900.³ A second move was the visit of the Iranian Ambassador in Washington to Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile on July 27, 1902. During this visit, a number of entente cordiale and commercial treaties were signed between the respective countries and Iran. Later on, during the reign of Shah Reza Pahlawi, Iran followed a policy in compliance with the Cold War conjuncture. While opening embassies in some Latin American countries, in accordance with the rules of the time such as an anti-Soviet stance and anti-Communism, Shah Pahlawi saw the relations with Latin America as an extension of the relations with the United States. The only exception in this regard has been the establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1974. With Cuba's attendance to the meeting between the anti-Shah actors, the relations were terminated after just two years of diplomatic relations and no higher levels were reached afterward.

The relations between Iran and Venezuela have been the most outstanding relations in the pre-Revolution period. While Venezuela got

¹ Dina Siegel Vann, "Canciller irani en America Latina: Visita Problematica", *El Pais*, 25 August 2016.

² "Iran looks to Latin America to revive missile infrastructure", *The Hill*, 29 August 2016. <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/293632-iran-looks-to-latin-america-to-revive-missile-infrastructure> (19 December 2016).

³ The official recognition of Henri Enthoven as the honorary consul by the Argentinian authorities was on January 4, 1901. **Paulo Botta**, "Iran en America Latina: Desde Venezuela hacia Brasil", 10 September 2009, <http://diariojudio.com/opinion/democracia-y-seguridad/iran-en-america-latina-desde-venezuela-hacia-brasil/79589/#> (20 December 2016).

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involved in close relations with Iraq, Kuwait, Iran and Saudi Arabia for the establishment of OPEC, it established relations with Iran on stronger grounds, following the establishment of OPEC in 1960. A few years later both sides opened embassies, the Iranian Shah visited Venezuela and Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez paid back an official visit to Tehran. Having that kind of past, Iranian-Venezuelan relations have been the engine of Iran's relations with the region, especially with Chavez's coming to power.

The Iranian government that has seen the inadequacy of diplomatic relations with the world following the 1979 Iranian Revolution became involved in diplomatic efforts toward multiple countries in order to attain worldwide recognition. The damaged relations with the West, and the United States, in particular, had unavoidably affected Iranian foreign policy. Mexico cut off relations with Iran to stand with the United States. In response, Iran cut off relations with Chile as a reaction to the massacres carried out by dictator Pinochet who was supported by the West. Due to overlapping outlooks between Iran and Cuba such as anti-Westernism and anti-imperialist stances, relations were re-established between Havana and Tehran. In a similar move, Iran opened embassies in Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Columbia in order to improve the relations. In terms of commercial relations, Iranian imports from Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay had increased to a considerable extent during this period.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Iran concentrated on the problems in the Middle East and for that reason, it did not pursue a direct and focused policy toward Latin America. However around that time actors like Hezbollah began to surface where Arabs live in Latin America in order to gain support, and were involved in activities such as money laundering for financing its activities. The border region between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay was one of the regions where Hezbollah had a presence. Although Hezbollah did not find much support in the northern part of Latin America, the vast Lebanese population-almost 8 million- drew Hezbollah to the southern part of the region. Surely we cannot fathom that Iran was oblivious of the activities of Hezbollah in Latin America, although, around that time, Iran remained behind the curtain and had not opened a front with the West. However, there is a common view that Iran used to carry out its secret operations via Hezbollah. The most visible support to that argument is the bombing of the

Jewish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires in 1994. The bombing is considered to be a retaliation for the killing of Hezbollah Leader Sheikh Abbas Al-Musawi and his family by Israel in February 1992. This terrorist attack attracted the attention of most Latin American countries on the presence of Hezbollah and the influence of Iran in the region.

A- Periodization of Iran - Latin America Relations

Apparently, the processes that shaped the Iranian-Latin American relations from the beginning of the 2000s were internal political dynamics, the Iranian-Western relations in global politics and personal friendships and relations.

1- The Rise of Leftism and the Beginning of Iranian Interest in the Region

The rise of leftist politics in the region, beginning with the rise of Hugo Chavez to power, was evaluated as the regions' search for non-Western alternatives in global politics. Having an anti-Western discourse in this regard, Chavez paid an official visit to Iran in 2001, and the coup attempt in 2002 against Chavez radicalized his political discourse. While raising his anti-Western discourse following the failed coup attempt, he had an immediate feeling to a global rapprochement with anti-Western countries. Around the same period, Iran was monitoring American intervention in Iraq and closely following the "warmonger" discourse of George W. Bush against Iran. The "axis of evil" discourse of Bush pushed Iran to search for rapprochement with anti-Western countries, as in the case of Venezuela. Initially, Iran perceived its relations with Venezuela in commercial terms and in the framework of OPEC. When its relations with the West reached a level of threat- anti-threat, Iran began to see Venezuela as a potential and natural political ally in order to enter Latin America, an area seen by the United States historically as a natural hinterland. That approach gained huge momentum with Ahmadinejad's coming to power and initiated the emergence of an "Iranian threat" in the eyes of the West.

2- Ahmadinejad and the Peak of the Relations (2005-2013)

With the rise of the Latin America's anti-Westernist and leftist politics; and the pressures on Iran due to the nuclear program combined, the Iranian-Latin American relations reached

new peaks under the leadership of Ahmadinejad and Chavez. Following the initial visit paid by Hugo Chavez, there had been around twenty high-level official visits between Venezuela and Iran. Simultaneously, Venezuela lobbied for better relations between Iran and other leftist governments and openly supported Iran to increase its influence in the region. For Chavez, the Venezuelan-Iranian partnership meant a powerful stance against the United States, in regional and global terms. Ahmadinejad paid eight official visits to the region, at the highest level, and that seriously disturbed the United States.

“With the rise of the Latin America’s anti-Westernist and leftist politics; and the pressures on Iran due to the nuclear program combined, the Iranian-Latin American relations reached new peaks under the leadership of Ahmadinejad and Chavez.”



The rapprochement between Tehran and Caracas has continued as to include deepened relations with Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. Around the same time, Iran strengthened relations with Brazil and had new momentum in its relations with Cuba. Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia, as members of ALBA⁴- the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, were waiting for support from Iran for the development of an energy sector. In order to develop their own energy sectors, they became involved in improving the relations with Iran for development in the agricultural and mining industries along with technology transfer.

⁴ The real presence of Iran in Latin America is through ALBA member countries. For detailed information see: Isaac Caro ve Isabel Rodriguez, “La Presencia de Iran en America Latina a travez de su Influencia en los Países del ALBA”, *Atenea*, No 2, 2009, pp. 21-39.

For Iran, that meant the importation of various products to Iran from Latin America and their distribution to the Middle East and beyond.

Iran opened six embassies in Latin America in the four years following 2005: Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay.⁵ Previously Iran had only five embassies in the region, in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, and Mexico. Especially after the opening of these embassies, Iran pursued policies for expanding relations beyond commerce to political, military, and cultural domains. In order to support these improved relations with a media channel and to make its own propaganda, Iran launched a television channel broadcasting in Spanish under the name of Hispan TV on December 21, 2011. The channel is still in operation.

Upon deepening relations with Venezuela, Iran signed various agreements with Cuba on commerce, banking, agriculture, health and culture and thus drew a new roadmap in relations with Cuba that stands as the historical representative of leftism and anti-Westernism in the region. In his 2006 visit, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad met with Fidel Castro and both leaders emphasized the anti-Westernist South-South cooperation and US threat in their speeches.

Having no relations with Iran between 1990-2007, Nicaragua re-initiated diplomatic relations with Iran upon the encouragement of Hugo Chavez. After that, the President of the Nicaraguan Parliament paid a symbolic official visit to Iran right after the re-building of relations.

The relations between Iran and Ecuador, which had merely official diplomatic relations since 1973 but nothing other than that, have impeded upon Rafael Correa’s coming to power in 2007. The participation of Ahmadinejad in Rafael Correa’s swearing-in ceremony demonstrates the importance he attributed to the relations. Iran opened an embassy in Quito and the relations between the two countries are currently at the same pace. Up until the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iran and Bolivia, relations were non-existent. However, the signature of mutual cooperation agreements and the three official visits of Ahmadinejad to Bolivia accelerated the relations between Iran and Bolivia.

⁵ Federico Pinedo, *Informe sobre las relaciones entre Iran y America Latina*, Friends of Israel Initiative, Paper no: 34, November 2015, s. 14.

The high level visits by the heads of states have opened the path for mutual gestures. For example Iran has moved its only embassy in the Middle East from Cairo to Tehran and Iran has opened an embassy and a cultural center in return, in Bolivia. Iran also launched a TV channel with the name of Hispan TV and still broadcasts news in Spanish from its own perspective. Curiously, in that period, flights were initiated between Tehran and Caracas, with transfers from Damascus. Any plane that departed from Venezuela first landed in Damascus and then departed to Tehran. For numerous experts,⁶ the flights were initiated as a screen for weapons trade between the two countries. In 2010, Venezuela canceled these flights.⁷

For Iran, the main purpose was to improve the relations with Brazil despite the fact that it has already improved the relations with left wing governments. The fact that Brazil increased its prestige during the period of Lula, and its significant commercial improvement have been important factors behind Brazil's importance for Iran. While improving relatively good relations with Lula in the initial period, Iran could not go beyond improved commercial relations with Brazil. The Tehran Agreement that Iran, Turkey and Brazil signed in 2010 has been the utmost and the latest high level conduct between Brazil and Iran. Having noticed that rapprochement with Iran pulls Brazil to another league, it has initiated a process of gradual estrangement from Iran.⁸ That process has been to the extent that Brazilian President Dima Roussef had not given an appointment to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his 2014 visit to Rio de Janeiro, alleging the lack of time as a pretext. In a similar vein, the suspicions toward Iran and Hezbollah regarding the bombing of the Jewish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires in 1994, the relations between Iran and Argentina has degraded. Since then, Iranian-Argentinian relations have not proceeded.

⁶ Linette Lopez, "Aeroteror: A regular flight from Caracas to Tehran carried more drugs and money than people", **Business Insider**, 25 March 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/aeroteror-venezuela-iran-and-latin-america-2015-3> (20 June 2017).

⁷ "Venezuela Cancels Round-Trip 'Terror Flight' to Syria and Iran", **Fox News**, 14 September 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/09/14/terror-flight-venezuela-iran-illicit-arms-hezbollah-hamas-protest.html> (19 June 2017).

⁸ For an analysis of that issue from a global systemic perspective see: Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey-Brazil Involvement in Iranian Nuclear Issue: What Is the Big Deal?", **Strategic Analysis**, Vol. 35, No 1, 2011, pp. 26-30.

3 - 2013-2016: The Process of Transition and Stagnation in Relations

With Ahmedinejad's leaving of power, the proactive policy of Iran toward Latin America entered a period of stagnation. The prioritization of matters related to Syria in Iranian foreign policy has unavoidably brought interest in Latin America to a pause. However, it can be told that the main reason for Iranian proactive policy toward Latin America has disappeared. The rapprochement with the West, and the agreement reached following it, had diminished Iranian need to pursue a proactive policy in the vicinity of the United States. Also, as the Iranian policies in Latin America were met with suspicion and seen as a danger, the rapprochement with the West led to the stagnation of relations.



"In the stagnation of relations after 2013, one could say that Iranian President Hasan Rohani's efforts to turn over a new leaf with the West has also had an influence."

In the stagnation of relations after 2013, one could say that Iranian President Hasan Rohani's efforts to turn over a new leaf with the West has also had an influence. Contrary to Ahmadinejad, Rohani has reduced the level of anti-Westernism both in discourse and in action. The general foreign policy approach of Rohani has indirectly shaped the relations between Iran and Latin America. To give an example from the policies of that period, various cultural and religious events held in the region with the support of Iran were canceled. The channels such as Hispan TV and Hispasatand Galaxy 19 that were put on the satellite lists for better rating have been removed for technical reasons. Despite the prior announcement on Hassan Rohani's participation

in the G-77 Summit, he canceled his attendance at the last moment.⁹

In general, besides the Iranian foreign policy and relations with the West, the developments in Latin America have also affected the bilateral relations. The death of Hugo Chavez in 2013 who acted like a gate-keeper and opened the gates of the region to Iran, has been the loss of Iran's biggest supporter in the region. The regression of left wing politics in the region starting with Venezuela has unavoidably led to changes in the work environment Iran has found in the region. Consequently, the relations between Iran and Latin America entered a period of stagnation from 2013 to 2016.

4 - After 2016: Rediscovery of the Region

In 2016, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Javad Zarifi went on a tour of official visits comprising six countries in the region. The visit was the most extensive and the highest level official visit to the region since Hassan Rohani's coming to power and should be seen as a new effort of the Iranian government toward building new relations with the region in the post-Chavez period.¹⁰ In the visit where he was accompanied by high-level politicians as well as 70 businessmen¹¹ and representatives from the private sector, Zarifi went to Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Considering the countries visited, one could say the previous relations still constitute the main pattern of Iranian foreign policy and Iran wishes to restore its ties to the region.

In this series of visits, commercial ties were emphasized rather than politics. For the reason that the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs did not want to harm Iran's relations with the West, he preferred to focus on commercial ties between Iran and Latin America. The visit of Zarifi was seen as Iran's return to the region and has been followed closely. However, a weakness of the visit should be noted that the visits did not include countries like Argentina and Brazil who have

been in key positions in economic and political regards.

B - The Issues that Shapes Relations

In the revival of Iranian interest in the region, some factors have been influential. Even though the oil issue and ties to OPEC have been among the main determinants of relations, anti-Westernism or anti-Americanism, Shiite propaganda and the efforts of Hezbollah to open up space for itself among the Lebanese Arabs who live in the region have been the factors in the forefront and shaped the Iranian approach to the region.

1- The Oil Factor and Membership to OPEC

From a global systemic perspective, the oil issue and OPEC membership constitute the most substantial tie in Iranian-Latin American relations. Particularly in the case of relations with Venezuela, OPEC membership has been the substantial tie between the two countries even before the Revolution in 1979.

In general, the underground resources of Iran have been the main sustenance of the relations between Iran and Latin America during the peak years of the relations. High oil prices up until 2010 have provided support for the left wing programs of Latin American governments and helped Iran to support various programs financially. However, in retrospect, the biggest critique against the left-wing Latin American governments have been their lack of planning when oil prices were at their peak and thus wasting resources, despite the fact that anti-Western propaganda was at the forefront. In this regard, the biggest lesson to learn from the left experience in Latin America has been the fact that it is hard to base economic order on natural resources. The same thing is the case with Iran's relations with the region. Iran and the left-wing governments of Latin America have been unsuccessful in building alternative economies through reliance on underground resources.

⁹ Federico Pinedo, *Informe sobre las relaciones entre Iran y America Latina*, Friends of Israel Initiative, Paper no: 34, November 2015, p. 16-17.

¹⁰ "Iran vuelve a America Latina; Que Significa para la Region?", *Russia Today*, 22 August 2016, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/216790-vuelta-iran-america-latina> (20 January 2017)

¹¹ Jose Steinsleger, "Iran en America Latina", *La Jornada*, 7 September 2016, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/09/07/opinion/017a1pol> (19 February 2017).

2- Anti-Americanism

The period of 2007-2012 was not welcomed by the Western governments when the relations between Iran and Latin America were at their peak. Iranian activities in the region were seen as a threat to Western interests. In this regard, particularly Western analysts have written reports, op-eds and analyses ringing the alarm bells. Obviously, both Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have used an anti-Western discourse that provided material to these analyses. While the anti-Western discourse that united Iran and the Latin American countries in the region has been a reactionary one, they were looking for a number of alternatives. Besides the factors such as the distance between two countries and the cultural and religious differences, the inability to go beyond the motto of "to unite against the West" precluded the permanence of the policies pursued.

Despite all the cooperation and efforts, the powerful anti-Western leftist stream that persisted since and has shaken the political system in Latin America since the 2000s, neither actually upset the balance nor built a political order anew. Despite all the uproar it created, in the nature of relations with Iran lies the inability of institutionalization. Those who will write the story of the Latin American Left in the 2000s will probably talk about that as a period of missed golden opportunities. Their coming to power in various countries at the same time, high oil prices, and distracted focus of the world on regions like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria have



given a golden opportunity to the Latin American Left. However, since the Latin American Left was involved in discursive polemics and prioritized increasing its legitimacy polemically, the practical aspects of the heritage it left behind will always be discussed. In the current situation, the Latin American Left has partially admitted the failure of its own anti-Westernist policy. The prominent left wing Latin American countries have a laxer approach to smooth versions of capitalism and they are transforming their policies accordingly.

3- Shiite Propaganda

Shiite propaganda has been one of the main components of Iranian policy toward Latin America. At the peak of relations, various cultural centers were opened throughout the region and functioned socially and culturally, as well as for gathering social intelligence when necessary. Through the same institutions, Latin American students were gathered and sent to Iran for educational purposes and thus, they were intended to create groups who have sympathy with Iran.

The opening of Shiite mosques in Latin American towns where the Muslim majority is Sunni has been the ideal occasion of Shiite propaganda. Numerous Muslims accused Iran of separatism, for inhabitant Muslims were invited to the Shiite mosques, in an attempt to create Shiite-linked groups. Those structures mostly financed by Iran did not find an echo among the Muslims and were shut down. However, Iran hosts many Latin American converts to Shiite Islam and educates them. As Iran provides these people employment at Hispan TV, it also contacts with authors and journalists that seem close to it and at least tries to preclude the emergence of an anti-Iran discourse.

After Iran created negative perceptions in the eyes of Muslims, it put forward a policy that catches less attention and is more efficient, in its opinion. Iran contacts with native Latin American authors and journalists that are close to it and opened the path for them to speak positively of its social policies. Consequently, the authors and journalist who became prominent as a result, are well-known by the people in the region. There is wide spread thinking that Iran pays such people in the region and makes them defend Iran as Latin Americans against any kind of anti-Iran propaganda that comes from the West.

4- Hezbollah's Presence in the Region

Despite that there are numerous reports and research about the actions of Hezbollah in Latin America, there is no clear data indicating whether the organization based itself in a systematic and orderly way in the region or rather it appears and disappears for some period. However, there are serious claims regarding the presence and actions of Hezbollah in the triple border region between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Commercial flow is fast in that region and it is claimed that Hezbollah is involved in money laundering, drug dealing and provides connection to some other marginal groups. In the same way, some people who had a connection to Hezbollah were arrested and charged with various claims.¹²

Additionally, there are those groups in the region who define themselves as the Latin American Hezbollah and are composed of Shiite Muslims who have been inspired by the struggles of Hezbollah in Lebanon. These entities are mostly involved in online propaganda and they try to gather supporters via the Internet. While they were widespread during the period between 2005 to 2013 when Iran had a proactive policy in the region, they disappeared later on. There is no clear data on whether these entities were organized groups or they were the propaganda tools of Iran. While initially, the alarm bells were ringing for these entities, later on, they were no longer on the agenda.¹³

The accusation of Iran because of the attack allegedly carried out by Hezbollah against the Israeli Cultural Center in Buenos Aires in 1994 demonstrates that Hezbollah is powerful enough in the region to carry out violent attacks.¹⁴ Even though no subjects responsible for the attack have been found the common opinion tilts toward Hezbollah by the order of Iran.

Conclusion: To What Extent is the Iranian Policy Successful?

In general, the eight years of Iranian-Latin American relations have nurtured from a strong anti-Western discourse, the strengthening of diplomatic relations and powerful personal ties.

¹² Paulo Botta, **La doble cara de Hezbollah en América Latina**, CEMOC, 2010. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/121126/2010_07_LaDobleCara.pdf (20 January 2017).

¹³ For detailed information see Paulo Botta, **La doble cara de Hezbollah en América Latina**, CEMOC, 2010, s. 3-4. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/121126/2010_07_LaDobleCara.pdf (20 January 2017).

¹⁴ Matthew Levitt, "Iranian and Hizbollah Operations in South America: Then and Now", **PRISM**, Vol 5, No 4, 2015, pp. 119-132.

For the moment, we can discuss a stagnation in relations. That stagnation is both in relations with the region in general and in the bilateral relations with countries like Brazil, Argentina, and others.

At the peak of relations, Iran have had 11 embassies and 10 cultural centers, financed various religious, cultural and social programs, and launched a TV channel broadcasting fully in Spanish. In the same period, Iran signed various agreement with Latin American countries in the fields of technology, health, food supply, industry, urban infrastructure, culture, and defense. As it is hard to measure the efficiency of these agreements, one can say that they were mainly not put into action. It should also be noted that the perceptions created against Iran by the Western actors are based on exaggerated opinions. For these West-centric perceptions are mostly based on lack of clear information and generally intend to spread misconceptions, they did not have much influence on Iran's relations with the West, however, to some extent, they have led to the emergence of a type of fear and suspicion at the public opinion and media level.

From a political perspective, the diplomatic relations are functioning at a normal level, however bilateral political relations are routinely continuing. The relations with Brazil are distant, and Brasil, Chile, and Argentina voted against Iran at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2014. As Venezuela focused on intrastate affairs, it did not keep a high profile with Iran, unlike before.

Iran has cut off its financial support to the cultural programs in the region, and no longer has a culture-focused program. In this regard, it closed some of its cultural centers in some countries. Many people have attended the programs financed by Iran and some of them are currently living in Iran. Furthermore, some people who live in the region are accused of terrorism.

"From a general perspective, the relations between Iran and Latin America that deepened via the powerful interpersonal relations between Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should be evaluated as a special period in history."

From a general perspective, the relations between Iran and Latin America that deepened

via the powerful interpersonal relations between Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should be evaluated as a special period in history. After these two leaders, the relations have receded and left a humble trace in the relations between the two parties. Even though economic and political relations have improved at a good pace in the 2000s, they have not opened a novel path for today's Iranian foreign policy.

When we look retrospectively, Iran is continuing its activities in the region however its policy is not as aggressive as before. It wants to continue the previous relations it built and wants to move them to a more rational ground. Most of the cultural centers and mosques that were opened in the time of Ahmadinejad for Shiite propaganda were closed for they have not aroused the expected attention and Iran realized that it is not a reliable investment. Iran is carrying out these affairs through its embassies.

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Mainly the perception toward Iran is not that bright because of the “dangerous Iran” discourse coming from the West, however, most of the countries prefer to sustain their relations with Iran. It is hard to predict the future of relations following the recent official visits to the region by the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, both the region and the Iranian approach to the region are undergoing transformations. In the coming period, we will witness a new period of Iranian-Latin American relations. However, the depth, persistence and the anti-systemic stance in the relations will be determined by the future of left wing governments in the region and where Latin American countries place Iran in their foreign policies.

Table 1: Import of Iran from Latin America USD

Import / USD	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Latin America and Caribbean	513,870,878	613,840,725	731,059,404	889,741,358	676,639,370	870,866,064	1,072,939,035	1,110,753,569	1,133,499,152	1,122,188,807	1,003,455,018	776,684,238
Mexica	221,818,980	256,085,920	281,926,513	308,583,120	234,384,532	301,481,734	350,842,806	370,751,407	381,210,149	399,976,864	395,232,221	387,064,500
Brazil	73,600,375	91,342,784	120,620,871	173,196,634	127,647,331	180,458,789	226,243,409	223,149,128	239,620,905	229,060,056	171,446,212	137,552,003
Chile	32,925,508	38,977,953	47,585,063	62,787,216	42,805,465	59,206,939	74,693,536	80,066,781	79,172,798	72,344,339	63,037,576	53,343,397
Argentina	28,688,638	34,153,542	44,707,042	57,461,774	38,786,162	56,792,359	73,980,656	67,973,972	74,441,745	65,229,692	59,786,946	55,609,530
Venezuela	21,204,162	26,162,440	32,897,045	39,688,840	32,897,671	40,682,508	54,674,822	58,087,854	59,381,197	64,027,610	54,057,599	44,889,367
Colombia	12,501,830	15,311,559	20,368,278	29,952,803	21,813,514	29,965,753	37,891,038	42,162,931	43,321,710	42,193,570	38,104,614	36,129,331
Peru	21,848,134	30,559,000	43,544,709	47,450,067	38,676,637	32,342,887	48,725,657	59,073,186	44,951,787	39,613,301	28,656,053	
Ecuador	4,154,931	10,774,926	13,268,935	15,736,509	13,876,550	19,365,829	25,382,541	27,218,424	25,720,267	24,780,413	22,509,571	
Trinidad and Tobago	9,608,701	12,113,558	13,565,297	18,851,930	15,089,885	20,590,848	24,286,061	25,196,517	27,064,499	27,518,178	21,387,292	
Panama	10,499,537	9,539,736	13,544,301	14,521,501	11,521,363	13,830,314	16,610,814	16,978,686	17,503,978	18,263,244	17,637,089	
Guatemala	6,804,052	8,421,973	10,594,387	12,167,110	12,054,439	15,138,223	18,156,133	17,430,206	17,844,951	17,751,695	17,347,815	
Costa Rica	9,173,270	11,070,461	12,757,849	15,289,400	11,550,461	13,920,244	18,263,805	18,355,993	18,124,469	17,186,199	15,504,471	15,324,723
Bolivia	6,809,107	7,762,676	8,820,612	9,817,654	7,325,362	8,416,163	9,964,508	10,269,627	10,771,953	10,512,850	10,415,403	9,854,597
Dominican Republic	3,273,773	4,757,640	5,859,421	9,033,191	6,939,842	10,033,466	12,366,127	11,555,136	12,142,040	12,168,558	10,291,213	9,752,574
Paraguay	2,343,293	2,824,839	3,521,959	5,005,961	4,408,976	5,603,874	7,935,744	8,590,085	9,352,971	10,492,101	9,766,442	8,426,933
Uruguay	3,878,882	4,806,056	5,627,663	9,069,360	6,906,725	8,621,758	10,726,378	11,652,108	11,642,380	10,762,297	9,489,417	7,476,190
El Salvador	4,419,363	4,920,567	6,530,363	8,153,858	5,922,938	6,895,088	8,543,255	8,648,837	8,603,906	7,984,500	8,386,748	7,918,034
Nicaragua	8,084,336	10,173,591	6,932,153	8,656,093	5,152,038	5,747,697	6,433,474	6,683,140	7,298,321	6,271,689	7,186,248	
Honduras	1,294,425	1,879,661	2,391,439	3,106,368	2,595,325	3,103,683	3,533,561	5,132,682	3,897,174	4,533,348	4,262,027	4,084,642
Cuba	2,318,592	2,980,152	3,621,477	3,175,061	2,332,175	2,775,702	3,618,244	3,216,412	3,138,740	2,339,126	1,886,096	

Table 2: Export of Iran from Latin America USD

Export / USD	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Latin America and Caribbean	570,908,402	681,561,250	720,873,074	885,323,595	698,036,085	883,092,926	1,102,473,109	1,123,369,890	1,116,436,676	1,082,446,005	921,494,437	784,450,348
Mexico	214,207,306	249,960,546	271,821,215	291,264,809	229,712,337	298,305,075	349,326,582	370,706,658	379,949,273	396,881,846	380,600,857	373,904,303
Brazil	118,528,688	137,806,190	160,648,870	197,942,443	152,994,743	197,356,436	256,038,702	242,579,776	242,178,054	225,098,405	191,126,886	185,235,401
Chile	41,972,988	59,379,149	68,560,429	64,507,601	55,459,977	71,106,106	81,437,589	77,985,383	76,684,108	76,639,248	63,360,064	57,737,906
Argentina	40,106,386	46,546,224	55,779,580	70,018,851	55,672,119	68,187,227	82,981,091	79,982,380	75,962,981	68,407,382	56,752,410	57,733,363
Venezuela	55,412,877	61,385,240	16,225,709	83,477,843	56,583,100	66,962,673	91,094,183	95,034,872	87,961,213	71,282,865	38,321,634	
Colombia	21,190,439	24,390,975	29,991,332	37,625,882	32,852,986	39,819,529	56,953,516	60,273,618	58,821,870	54,794,812	35,690,767	30,984,392
Peru	17,114,289	23,764,897	28,084,585	31,288,212	26,738,260	35,807,438	46,386,022	46,366,536	42,568,899	38,459,251	33,244,872	36,039,994
Ecuador	9,869,357	12,727,796	13,800,364	18,818,325	13,863,050	17,489,922	22,342,524	23,852,017	24,957,644	25,724,432	18,330,608	
Trinidad and Tobago	9,611,480	14,018,734	13,396,245	18,650,425	9,125,971	10,981,679	20,047,397	20,034,864	19,578,969	18,630,675	12,291,638	
Panama	963,764	8,033,926	8,820,595	9,816,620	10,716,687	12,215,863	15,896,225	16,766,628	15,718,136	13,778,161	12,061,293	
Guatemala	5,380,816	3,198,084	6,898,540	7,736,697	7,208,586	8,460,153	10,161,041	10,124,387	10,065,329	10,890,691	10,677,394	
Costa Rica	7,150,688	7,254,866	8,927,619	9,744,538	8,836,345	9,044,841	10,222,241	11,250,804	11,472,064	11,251,853	9,587,045	9,914,296
Bolivia	2,797,417	4,223,298	4,812,702	6,899,336	5,296,740	6,965,357	9,144,424	11,814,277	12,207,463	12,856,061	8,725,920	7,081,933
Dominican Republic	6,183,383	6,079,884	6,793,734	6,421,634	4,374,408	4,766,734	6,112,524	7,168,472	7,960,984	9,927,796	8,384,108	
Paraguay	1,655,111	1,843,244	2,817,188	4,463,309	3,167,021	6,504,798	7,763,530	7,282,792	9,456,253	9,635,735	8,361,165	8,493,697
Uruguay	3,421,892	3,989,321	4,517,549	5,941,895	5,404,763	6,724,162	7,911,749	8,709,217	9,065,754	9,165,708	7,669,515	7,010,613
El Salvador	3,436,476	3,729,993	4,014,539	4,641,070	3,866,080	4,499,243	5,308,179	5,339,088	5,491,094	5,272,670	5,484,928	5,335,380
Nicaragua	866,023	758,642	1,194,541	2,537,600	1,393,054	1,847,629	2,280,872	4,550,647	4,594,148	4,973,501	4,667,366	
Honduras	1,294,425	1,879,661	2,391,439	3,106,368	2,595,325	3,103,683	3,533,561	5,132,682	3,897,174	4,533,348	4,262,027	4,084,642
Cuba	2,318,592	2,980,152	3,621,477	3,175,061	2,332,175	2,775,702	3,618,244	3,216,412	3,138,740	2,339,126	1,886,096	



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