

The Mobilization of Iranian efforts and Hezbollah in Latin America

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Table of Contents

Introduction of Terrorism in Latin America.....	3
Purpose and Contribution of Research.....	3-4
Broader Implications	4-5
Literature Review.....	5-7
Iran’s History in Latin America	7-8
<i>Iranian Presidencies’ Contributions to the Relationships in Latin America.....</i>	<i>8-12</i>
<i>Investments.....</i>	<i>12-14</i>
<i>Nuclear Goals for Latin America.....</i>	<i>14-15</i>
The Formation of Hezbollah	15-16
<i>The Organization of the Group.....</i>	<i>16-17</i>
<i>The Future of the Organization.....</i>	<i>17-18</i>
Research Design Case Studies	18
Colombia	18
<i>Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).....</i>	<i>18-19</i>
<i>Bandas Criminales (BACRIM) or Criminal Bands.....</i>	<i>19</i>
Venezuela	20
<i>Summary of Iran’s and Venezuela’s Relationship.....</i>	<i>20-21</i>
<i>The Saleh Clan.....</i>	<i>21-22</i>
<i>The Nassereddine Clan.....</i>	<i>22-23</i>
<i>The Rada Clan.....</i>	<i>23-25</i>
The Tri-Border Area	25
<i>Geography</i>	<i>25-26</i>

<i>Muslim Population</i>	26
<i>Illegal Activities</i>	26-27
<i>Drug Trafficking</i>	27-28
A Comparison to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).....	28-29
Attacks Connected to Hezbollah and Iran	29-30
<i>Bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos</i>	30
<i>AMIA Bombing</i>	30-31
Older and Recent Developments (Timeline).....	31-33
Possible Solutions	34-35
Conclusion	35
Works Cited.....	36-40

Introduction of Terrorism in Latin America

The United States began tracking terrorism more in Latin America after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. The State Department concluded in the 2015 *Country Reports on Terrorism* that a large number of the terrorist attacks in the Western Hemisphere were executed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).¹ However, policymakers are more concerned with Iran's involvement in the region because the country is trying to find a way to escape U.N. and U.S. sanctions by using the terrorist group Hezbollah to assert more force and by forming relations with local governments that are also anti-imperialism. Additionally, both Iran and Hezbollah are connected to two bombings in Argentina in the 1990s. In 2013, the State Department released a report to Congress that Iran's activities in Latin America were diminishing and that there are no active operational known cells of Hezbollah either. However, Latin American supporters continue the ideology of the group and fund them.² Many individuals believe that the State Department is doubting the severity of their infiltration and think that there are still members of Hezbollah and government officials from Iran working with local drug cartels and governments, such as Venezuela.

Purpose and Contributions of this Research

This paper is meant to show that there is still a large threat presented by Iran and Hezbollah. Iran created and brought Hezbollah to South America to further spread the country's ideology and gain economic interest. They have done so with the help of local terrorist

¹ Sullivan, Mark P., and June S. Beittel. pg.1 *Latin America: Terrorism Issues*. Congressional Research Service, 15 Aug. 2014, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RS21049.pdf>

² Sullivan, Mark P., and June S. Beittel pg.1

organizations (FARC and Criminal Band) and support from the local governments (Venezuela), who have given members of the organizations positions in the government or citizenship papers to bring people from the Middle East because of relations developed by past Iranian presidents. Furthermore, Hezbollah and Iran use the Tri-Border Area (TBA) to traffic drugs, smuggle individuals, and train and recruit new members because there is no military force present to deter said efforts. The area is a lawless region that gives a tremendous amount of funding for weapons and future attacks. The main question that will be addressed and answered is "How do drug trafficking organizations aid transnational terrorist groups and heavily sanctioned countries (Iran) to gain legitimacy and spread their dominance in foreign countries? The simple answer to that is drug trafficking organizations provide protection and false citizenship papers and cause local governments to collude with transnational terrorist groups and sanctioned countries for economic gain and future investments.

Broader Implications

By not addressing this threat of narcoterrorism, Hezbollah will continue to mobilize and expand. If policymakers address this issue now and implement many policies to deter and terminate drug and terrorist organizations, then many governments within the region will stabilize. For example, Venezuelans will elect a president that they want and need because illegitimate President Nicolás Maduro will no longer have funding from Iran to make the economy stay afloat and inflict power. Additionally, this might help other economies in the region, such as Paraguay, which is suffering because counterfeit goods (pharmaceuticals) are smuggled into the country. This currently threatens the health and safety of many citizens, defrauds those who researched and developed the patents for those products, and denies the

government vital tax revenues.³ Also, if this threat is handled correctly, there would be fewer illegal drugs smuggled into countries, therefore, decreasing drug use worldwide. Lastly, this research might reveal patterns seen in other regions with similar groups and tactics of mobilization. In turn, many terrorist and drug organizations might be forced to de-escalate or stop completely, therefore, eliminating the tremendous threat.

Literature Review (Main Papers/Publications used)

Rex Hudson's *Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America*, organized by the *Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress*, mentions the main cities of the Tri-Border area, which are the Argentine city of Puerto Iguazú, the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguacu, and the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este. These locations are often used by drug cartels and terrorist groups as a way to fund their agendas because the region is lawless and lacks a military presence. Additionally, Hudson provides statistics of the Muslim population in the area and how that has contributed to Iran's and Hezbollah's overall success in Latin America. Lastly, Hudson's research shows how illicit activities, such as planning terrorist attacks, conspiring with other groups, and drug trafficking, are normal activities in the area.

Joseph M. Humire's *The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-backed Networks Prop Up the Venezuelan Regime*, issued by the *Atlantic Council of the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center*, shows how familial clans, Saleh, Nassereddine, and Rada, worked in collaboration with multiple Venezuelan regimes (primarily the Maduro regime) and the Colombian cartels to

³ Realuyo, Celina B, pg. 120-121., "The Terror-Crime Nexus: Hezbollah's Global Facilitators." *PRISM*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26470385. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.

generate money for future attacks and to create a substantial amount of convergence points/networks for the trafficking of goods and smuggling of weapons. These clans are largely the reason why Hezbollah and Iran are so successful in Latin America and can expand elsewhere.

Stephen Johnson's *Iran's Influence in the Americas*, published by the *Center of Strategic International Studies*, shows how Iran formed relations in Latin America through numerous presidential terms. All of the Iranian presidents after the Islamic Revolution worked closely with Latin American countries to end Iran's isolation, expand trade, strengthen their economy, and ensure that other countries with similar leaders resist imperialism and colonialism. Additionally, Johnson shows how Iran's partnership with Latin America solidified because of certain investments in Venezuela, such as oil production, which also benefited Ecuador and Bolivia. One last important section mentioned in the report is Iran's nuclear goals for countries in Latin America. Iranian officials want to help countries gain material that can be used to create nuclear weapons. In return, they keep some of the material since they are constantly being watched and limited because of sanctions.

Matthew Levitt's *Iran Hezbollah Operation in South America: Then and Now*, issued by *PRISM*, discusses what happened at the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish center bombing, which was a terrorist attack that resulted in 85 people dead and 150 people severely wounded. The United States and Israel conducted investigations to see who was at fault and found connections to Hezbollah and the Iranian government.

Celina B. Realuyo's *The Terror-Crime Nexus: Hezbollah's Global Facilitators*, issued by *PRISM*, mentions how certain countries are suffering from Iran's and Hezbollah's illicit activities, such as Paraguay because of counterfeit goods that put consumer's health at risk. Additionally, Realuyo provides a timeline of attacks successfully executed by Hezbollah and

supported by Iran, which includes the Israeli Embassy bombing in Buenos Aires and the AMIA Jewish Community Center bombing. Lastly, the research paper has great information regarding drug trafficking activities involving Hezbollah, the Criminal Bands, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

Mark P. Sullivan's and June S. Beittel's *Latin America: Terrorism Issues*, published by the *Congressional Research Service*, provides facts about how reports have linked the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to a sufficient amount of terrorist attacks in the Western Hemisphere. The research paper also mentions how Iran's involvement in Latin America became a pressing issue because the country was attempting to escape U.S and U.N. sanction and their rumored involvement with Hezbollah planned terrorist attacks in Argentina. Sullivan and Beittel believe that Hezbollah's and Iran's presence has greatly diminished and is no longer a threat, while other experts greatly disagree.

Iran's History in Latin America

Iran enjoys forming relationships with nations that were exploited by major superpowers, hence their interest in Latin America. The country also wants to improve its economy, policy, and security ties by working with said countries, therefore, ending its isolation from the international community. Iran diplomatically worked with Mexico in 1889 and 1902 through 1903 with Argentina and Brazil. Additionally, Mexico's oil industry attracted Iran and Venezuela for financial reasons, which caused both countries to create the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 to ensure quality treatment for international oil companies.⁴

⁴ Johnson, Stephen. pg. 4 *Iran's Influence in the Americas*. Center for Strategic & International Studies, Mar. 2012, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120312_Johnson_Iran%27sInfluence_web.pdf

Many of these countries were willing to work with Iran because they were a part of the Non-Aligned Movement Nations in Latin America, which is comprised of governments that disagree with U.S. foreign policy. The United States only helps said nations when a clear threat is present, so this lack of attention benefits the Iranian government because they want to develop nuclear weapons without Europe and the U.S. knowing. In short, Iran's main objectives in Latin America are to continue and expand strategies with local areas, show its strong relationship with Venezuela, openly go against American foreign policy with other governments, and promote relationships with new governments (Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador).⁵ Iran wants to assert dominance in an area close to the United States to undo the opinions and views issued by American foreign policy that has caused isolation.

Iranian Presidencies' Contributions to the Latin American Relationships

The 2,500-year-old monarchy headed by Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi continues to expand relations because of the exportation of raw materials and the creation of OPEC with Venezuela, which aimed to help the international economic order. Additionally, the Shah Era opened embassies in Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela. Lastly, he attempted to expand Iranian influence in Cuba under his National Independent Foreign Policy in 1975. However, talks ended because President Fidel Castro met with Tudeh, the banned Communist Party of Iran. The monarchy came to end because of the Islamic Revolution and resulted in the implementation of different foreign policy initiatives.

Iran's first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini assumed power and made relations with social and pro-Soviet governments (Cuba and Nicaragua) thrive. In 1979, after the

⁵ de Arimateia da Cruz, Jose de Arimateia, pg. 1-2., *Iran, Latin American, and U.S. National Security*. E-International Relations, 21 Oct. 2014, www.e-ir.info/pdf/52527.

Islamic Revolution, Castro began to support anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini openly. Additionally, in 1981 Castro allowed an Iranian embassy to open in Havana, Cuba, even though Cuba had connections with Iraq, who was at war with Iran.⁶ It is rumored that the Castro Regime helped Iran with creating Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard. In 1983, Nicaragua's minister of education, Fernando Cardenal, met with Khomeini, which was considered a rare meeting for foreign officials. Khomeini believed that Nicaragua and Iran have the same goal, which is that all oppressed countries remain close allies and resist American or Soviet infiltration.⁷ In short, Khomeini only cared if these countries possessed a great dislike for the West.

Ayatollah Khomeini addressed economic problems by establishing relationships with Brazil and Argentina. Iran began purchasing wheat from Argentina, which helped with commerce. Brazil and Iran began to build industries and set up a meeting in October 1988 about the equipment of power plants. Additionally, Iran's industries minister claimed both countries needed to increase trade to \$1.5 billion.⁸ However, Iran began to suffer tremendously from the Iran-Iraq war because over more than 1 million people were either killed or injured. The war also wreaked havoc on the country's economy and industries. Lastly, Khomeini died in June 1989, therefore, causing Iran needed to regroup immediately.

The next Iranian president from 1989 until 1997 was Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was not as aggressive towards the West and wanted to mend relations with both Europe and the United States after the war with Iraq. Despite these statements, the West was not fully convinced by Rafsanjani's new approach, so he continued ties with Latin American countries. During his time as president, two terrorist attacks were executed on an Israeli embassy in Argentina in 1992 and the Argentine-Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) in 1994. Both events were associated

⁶ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 6

⁷ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 6

⁸ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 7

with Iran and the terrorist organization Hezbollah. There is no direct evidence pointing to Iran's involvement in the attack, but around the same time, Argentina canceled an agreement that would entitle Iran to nuclear technology. However, the reasons for these attacks remain unknown.

Muhammad Khatami won the 1997 election and began to reform domestic and foreign policy to reduce tensions largely with the United States. In 1988, the Clinton Administration said that President Khatami is moving Iran in a better direction that involved denouncing terrorism and better treatment for Iraqi and Afghan refugees.⁹ Additionally, Iran implemented diplomatic measures and worked well with neighbors in the Gulf to stabilize Afghanistan. However, Khatami reached a point that he could no longer agree to the increasingly large list of U.S. demands. The George W. Bush administration put a halt on diplomatic measures with Iran after the September 11th terrorist attacks and tightened sanctions involving weapons of mass destruction. The United States began alluding to the fact that Iran needed a regime change, even though the Khatami administration helped the United States to work with the North alliance (a group comprised of Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek leaders) to form a post-Taliban Afghan government. However, President Bush still labeled Iran as evil.

Iran tried to rebuild relations under the Khatami regime with the United States after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 by sending a letter that Iran will meet the majority of U.S. demands. The demands they agreed to involved transparency on their nuclear program, stopping assistance with Palestinian groups in Iranian terrorism, telling and supporting Hezbollah to start changing terrorism policies to more political ones, and agreed that the Arab League Peace Plan provided a reasonable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁰ However, the letter was completely

⁹ *A National Security for a New Century*, The White House, October 1998, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=2959>

¹⁰ Johnson, Stephen. pg. 9

dismissed. This resulted in Iran making relations in Africa and maintaining existing ones in Latin America.

In 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president and wanted to reuse Iran's post-revolution conservative values in both domestic and foreign policy. One of Ahmadinejad's first talks took place at an event called "The World without Zionism" and involved him reciting a similar view that Ayatollah Khomeini once had about how Israel should disappear. Additionally, he gave another lecture at the Foreign Ministry, which does not necessarily believe in the Holocaust.¹¹ His choice of words and his tone began to worry the United States, so tighter policies were implemented. In response, Iran began working with countries that shared the same anti-imperialist views, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. Ahmadinejad liked maintaining relations with Latin American countries because of the region's proximity to the United States.

Since Ahmadinejad did not want to work with the U.S., he created three important foreign policy objectives targeted to Latin American relationships. The first piece of the policy stated to circumvent isolation and to build support amongst nonaligned countries, such as Brazil and Venezuela. This part of the foreign policy seemed to be working well because Ahmadinejad called former Venezuela President Hugo Chávez his brother, who also resists domination from a superpower. Additionally, an adviser named Hamid Molana noticed that it was the first time an Islamic government has created such a presence and relationship in the backyard of the U.S.¹² The second goal was to gain more access to trade links because European sanctions were causing high levels of unemployment and poverty and limited funding for Iran's military programs. The last objective pertains to achieving cultural acceptance. This seemed to be completed, to some extent, because Iran encouraged others to learn the Persian language and agreed to hold film and

¹¹ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 10

¹² Johnson , Stephen. pg. 10-11

movie exhibitions in Latin American countries. Iran also allowed the construction of Shia mosques and the education of Shiism to other Muslims and non-Muslims to help Saudi Arabia spread anti-Shia Wahhabism.¹³ Lastly, Iran used the media to connect with the people of Latin America and provided money to humanitarian aid projects.

In short, numerous Iranian presidents formed relations with Latin American countries to end their country's isolation, expand trade, and strengthen the Islamic mission of anti-imperialism. However, some presidents attempted to work with the United States but were dismissed. This dismay fueled up the Iranian government and caused them to further expand in Latin America, therefore, continuing their threat to the U.S.

Investments

Iran's partnership with Venezuela goes far beyond any other investments made in other Latin American countries because their joint economic commission was created in 2001. This commission led to an agreement between both countries about the renovation of a tractor assembly facility. Iranian President Khatami and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez established the Veniran Tractor Company in Ciudad Bolívar in 2005. The Iran Tractor Manufacturing Company owns 51 percent of Veniran. Iran agreed to provide between \$80 and \$100 million annually because Khatami believed in self-sufficiency.¹⁴ The following year in 2006, the Venirauto automobile manufacturing project was created in Maracay. Iran's Khodro Automobiles (IKCO) produced many vehicles for the global market and owns most of the stock of the said company. Venirauto agreed to make 25,000 cars a year, which were decently priced for consumers and were less than many imports. Defense Minister Raúl Baduel and Iran's

¹³ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 11

¹⁴ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 28

ambassador, Abdollah Zifan, gave 227 of the cars as a reward to Venezuela's military academy graduates in 2007.¹⁵

Iranian sponsored oil and gas projects in countries, such as, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia have also strengthened relationships in the region. Stephen Johnson's *Iran's Influence in the Americas* provides a timeline of Iran's oil production in Latin America. The timeline will be summarized in the following bullet points:¹⁶

- In December 2005, Iran and other foreign oil companies decided to help Venezuela explore extra-heavy crude deposits in the Orinoco River Belt
- During July 2006, Iran stated that the country will invest \$4 billion in Venezuelan oil fields and agreed to help and support the exploration of Venezuela's Carbon- 2 offshore gas block. Additionally, Iran and Venezuela created a petrochemical company that will officially launch in 2010 with an investment backing of \$2 billion.
- Around July 2007, both Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan President Chávez agreed to build two methanol plants, one would be in the southern Assaluyeh region in Iran and the other Sigma Industrial Zone in Venezuela. Near the same time, both leaders opened a petroleum trading company called the Venezuelan-Iranian Oil and Gas Company or VENTIROGC. Mohammad Ali Talebi, in charge of the Venezuelan operations at Petropars Ltd, believed that this company would be comparable to others, such as *Chevron* and *Shell*, because they will be doing the process from production to gasoline stations.

¹⁵ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 28

¹⁶ Johnson , Stephen. pg. 29-30

- Iran began to help Bolivia in September 2007 by agreeing to provide \$1 billion to help establish the oil and gas sector in the country.
- Ecuador received support from Iran and Venezuela in September 2008 because they promised to construct a new refinery and petrochemical facilities there.
- In 2009, the media stated the PDVA (an oil company from Venezuela) signed to construct 17 small oil fields in Iran and is willing to work with other foreign companies through Iran's South Pars gas project.
- In September 2009, Oil minister from Iran and Venezuela named Masoud Miirkazemi and Rafael Ramíres signed multiple agreements that would ensure refine gasoline for Iran in case more sanctions were implemented or tightened.
- Petropars Venezuela chief Ali Talebi made the construction of a 140,000 barrel-per-day oil refinery in Syria, which was the main goal of VENIROGC's. Venezuela owned 33 percent while Iran possessed 26 percent of the shares. The leftover shares would be given to both Syria and Malaysia.
- Iran continued to help Bolivia in June 2010 by providing 12 oil and gas blocks in the country.

Nuclear Goals for Latin America

Iran's nuclear goals for Latin American countries come with many objectives, which include obtaining assistance from countries like Argentina and Brazil (with peaceful programs) to give some kind of aid to Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. This support might have many economic benefits, but this type of partnership convinces countries to vote against sanctions in the UN Security Council that would hinder Iran, which is what Cuba and Ecuador did on

November 8, 2011. The second objective is that some aid negotiations can be a front for getting special material and technology to create something or a better facility. There are many reports showing materials of nuclear contraband arriving from somewhere else for Iran. In December 2010, 400 suspected tubes in jet cargo arrived for Iran. Then on March 18, 2011, there was a ship with a stainless steel tank and mixing devices that could be used to create nuclear weapons.¹⁷ This ship was heading towards Iran but was stopped and seized by Malaysian authorities.

In short, countries that Iran help in obtaining material to construct nuclear weapons benefits them too because they receive a cut of said material. Iran would not be able to have raw ore and other things because that would violate nuclear-related sanctions.

The Formation of Hezbollah

Hezbollah (also known as “The Party of God”) is a Shi’a Muslim group whose ideology and formation originates from the Iranian Revolution. The revolution occurred because there was a demand for a group that involved religious Muslims who were oppressed and wanted something similar to the Shi’ite Amal movement. The movement was called Lebanese Resistance Detachment, which was a militant Lebanese Shia group that had connections with Iran to help protect the Shia population in Southern Lebanon.¹⁸ Additionally, there was a Lebanese Civil War in 1975 because of Palestinian influence in the region. This influence caused political power to be divided amongst different religious groups, such as Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians, and Shiite Muslims. Tensions formed when the Sunni Muslim population grew, and the Christian minority ruled Lebanon. Israel took advantage of the situation and

¹⁷ Johnson , Stephen. pg.. 59

¹⁸ *Hezbollah: History & Overview*. Jewish Virtual Library , www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-of-hezbollah

invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 to prevent other attacks from Palestinian fighters.¹⁹ In response, Iran also invaded Lebanon in 1978 and at the end of 1982, and brought in the Revolutionary Guard Corps to implement their Islamic movement in Lebanon and adopted an Iranian doctrine. This allowed them to use terror to make political gains, which would help them in the jihad against Israel.²⁰ These forces taught Iranian ideology in the area of Baalbek in Lebanon and formed the main core of Hezbollah.

The Organization of the Group

Hezbollah's main leader, Hassan Nasrallah, assumed his position as secretary-general in 1992 because of the Israeli planned assassination of the cofounder and leader, Abbas Al-Musawi. Nasrallah is in control of the Shura Council, and the five sub councils called the political assembly, the jihad assembly, the parliamentary assembly, the executive assembly, and the judicial assembly. The U.S. State Department believes that Hezbollah has a large amount (tens of thousands) of members throughout the world.²¹

Hezbollah has the majority of power in dominated Shiite areas, which are located in pieces of Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the eastern Bekaa Valley region. Despite this control, the group's manifesto does not confine the group to Lebanese borders and makes it clear that they are targeting the United States. The group is rumored to be involved in acts of terrorism targeted at Israel. It is also proven that Hezbollah's missions have expanded to Africa, the Americas, and Asia. The reason they can plan and execute their attack is that Iran provides the weapons and

¹⁹ Robinson, Kali. "What Is Hezbollah?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 1 Sept. 2020, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah.

²⁰ "Hezbollah: History & Overview. Jewish Virtual Library

²¹ Robinson, Kali. "What Is Hezbollah?"

gives over \$700 million a year.²² They also earn their money from a legal business, international criminal enterprises, and the Lebanese diaspora.

The Future of the Organization

Researchers claim that Hezbollah's international network is growing, but the organization does not want a war with Israel or the United States, hence the lack of reaction to an Israeli drone strike in Beirut in August 2019. The group prefers being active through covert operations or acts of terrorism, especially if Israel or the United States goes to war with Iran. Hezbollah wants to strike, and tension overall is high because, in September of 2019, the group attacked an Israeli army base, which was the first cross-border exchange to happen in four years. This attack caused the Israel Defense to create a simulation of war against Hezbollah in May of 2020. U.S.-Iran relations are not exactly perfect either because of the U.S. airstrike and assassination of Qasem Soleimani (led the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp Ground Forces' Quds Force, which controls external operations) in January 2020. Hezbollah vowed to attack American force, but not civilians.²³

In January 2020, Hezbollah and Prime Minister Hassan Diab did not support another form of the Lebanese government, which did not sit well with the protestors. However, Hezbollah believed that this would pose a threat to the organization's power domestically. COVID-19 is only making the situation worse for them because of unemployment, poverty, and debt being at an all-time high. However, Hezbollah refuses to change because they believe that allowing a new government to form would decrease or terminate the group's power and

²² Robinson, Kali. "What Is Hezbollah?"

²³ Robinson, Kali. "What Is Hezbollah?"

influence. If protestors rise, then some serious governmental change could be seen, but for now, Hezbollah continues to control much of the Lebanese government.

Research Design: Case Studies

The following case studies show how Iran planted Hezbollah members to mobilize within the region with the help of local governments, cartels, or lack of laws.

Colombia

Hezbollah's relationship with Colombia formed because of the following drug cartels:

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

FARC is a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group established in 1964 by Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas. The group consisted of many members from the rural population because they were forgotten by the Colombian government during the years of 1948 to 1958, which is known as La Violencia.²⁴ FARC's main goal was to overthrow the government, use drug networks, kidnap, extortion, and other illegal activities to launch attacks (similarly to what Hezbollah is doing).

American and Colombian investigators began to track FARC because they wanted to end the activity with a cocaine smuggling and money laundering ring, which was linked to Hezbollah. After two years, 130 individuals were arrested, and \$23 million was seized by the U.S. and Colombia.²⁵ One of the people arrested was a Lebanese kingpin, Chekry Harb, and was a middleman for Latin American cocaine traffickers and Middle Eastern radicals. Harb laundered

²⁴ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia." Stanford University. Last modified July 2019.

<https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc>

^c

²⁵ Chris Kraul and Sebastian Rotella, "Drug probe finds Hezbollah link: Officials say they've broken up Colombian ring that helped fund the militant group," LA Times, October 22, 2008, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-oct-22-fg-cocainering22-story.html>

millions of dollars for years and made sure to give 12 percent of the revenue generated to Hezbollah. The guilty cartel and paramilitary members smuggled cocaine to the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Colombia's government and FARC entered peace negotiations and no longer plans terrorism attacks, but still are trafficking drugs.

Bandas Criminales (BACRIM) or Criminal Bands

BACRIM (the heirs to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) formed in the 1990s to stop FARC's terrorist attacks. They are connected to drug trafficking from growing coca, the main ingredient found in cocaine. This allowed BACRIM to produce about 50 percent of the cocaine in Colombia and expand their market to the Mexican drug cartels and are believed to be the new suppliers for Hezbollah. They care more about making a profit than taking a political stance like FARC attempted to do. BACRIM is labeled as a transnational criminal organization (TCO) by the United States.²⁶

In 2013, the Army and National Police arrested about 1,738 members of BACRIM and seized 300.5 tons of drugs.²⁷ Colombia continues to try to disband this group by expanding the government's Attorney General's Office with the top-of-line prosecutors to ensure that members of the group are held accountable for their actions, which include kidnapping, corruption, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering. Additionally, these investigations are formulating connections between the Mexican drug cartels and Hezbollah operatives.

Venezuela

Summary of Iran's and Venezuela's Relationship

²⁶ Realuyo, Celina B, pg. 123

²⁷ Realuyo, Celina B, pg. 123

Venezuela became a haven for those fleeing the Lebanese Civil War because of the country's stable economy and a high stand of living.²⁸ However, Iran's relationship with Venezuela began when it became founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960. This relationship continued when President Mohammed Khatami (1997-2005) began to trade more in Latin America and advance Iran's partnership with Venezuela. Additionally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Iranian President Ahmadinejad signed numerous agreements in 2005 about agriculture, petrochemicals, oil exploration, automobiles, and housing, therefore, showing strong diplomatic and economic ties between the countries. This action helped Iran to form relations with other Latin American countries (Bolivia and Ecuador), who are against American foreign policy.²⁹ Lastly, Chavez appointed people with ties to Hezbollah to the Foreign Ministry, therefore, giving them diplomatic status.

The current illegitimate President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, continues to maintain relations with Iran by allowing individuals tied to Hezbollah to arrange meetings with members of the Venezuelan government in the Middle East. For example, a meeting was held with a Hezbollah operative, former Venezuelan Interior Minister Tareck El Aissami, and the Venezuelan military counterintelligence chief, Hugo Carvajal Barrios. The meeting was held to discuss cocaine for weapons deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Hezbollah, which resulted in a Lebanese cargo plane full of arms arriving on the president's hanger in an airport in Caracas, Venezuela, and cocaine given to Hezbollah by the Maduro regime from FARC, therefore, showing government collusion in illicit practices.³⁰

²⁸ Humire, Joseph. pg. 5, *The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-Backed Networks Prop up the Venezuelan Regime*. Atlantic Council of the Adrienne Arsht Latin American Center, Oct. 2020,

www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-Maduro-Hezbollah-Nexus-How-Iran-backed-Networks-Prop-up-the-Venezuelan-Regime.pdf.

²⁹ Sullivan & Beittel pg. 10-11

³⁰ Humire, Joseph. pg. 8

Hezbollah is successful in Latin America because their familial clan structures became worked with the Venezuelan government. The clans (the Saleh, Nassereddine, and Rada. Clan) contribute to the illicit economy and the overall survival of the country. Members of these groups of Hezbollah adjusted well because of the large Lebanese and Syrian population communities that also reached Colombia.

The Saleh Clan

A two-year investigation of Hezbollah's crime-terror network in Colombia revealed that \$23 million was earned through illicit ways and moved through West Africa into Lebanon. One hundred and thirty people were arrested, and the money was seized. Operation Titan stopped further movement of a money laundering and drug trafficking ring led by Hezbollah with the help of Colombian locals with a leader named Ayman Saied Joumaa. The United States charged the Colombian- Lebanese drug King, Atman Joumaa, for trafficking cocaine in collaboration with Los Zetas in Mexico and working with Hezbollah at a maritime shipping network.³¹ The reason Operation Titan occurred in 2008 was that Colombia wanted to investigate a Medellín cartel called La Oficina de Envigado, or "La Oficina."³² This investigation revealed that La Oficina had relations with a Lebanese community on the Caribbean Coast of Colombia and was tied to Hezbollah because they created cross-border trade and cash couriers in Venezuela and Colombia.

A Shai businessman and a Hezbollah member, Ali Mohamad Saleh (leader of the

³¹ "U.S. Charges Alleged Lebanese Drug Kingpin with Laundering Drug Proceeds for Mexican and Colombian Drug Cartels," US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia, December 13, 2011, <https://www.justice.gov/archive/usao/vae/news/2011/12/20111213joumaanr.html>; "Treasury Sanctions Maritime Network Tied to Joumaa Criminal Organization," US Department of Treasury, press release, October 1, 2015, [-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0196.aspx](https://www.treasury.gov/press-releases/Pages/jl0196.aspx).

³² Humire, Joseph. pg. 6

cross-border crime-terror network) and his brother, Kassem Mohamad Saleh, were labeled as terrorists financiers by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). For a long period, the Saleh clan led the illicit activities that involved drugs, weapons, contraband, and money laundering in Maico, Colombia, which is near the northern border of Venezuela. The local drug cartel working for the Maduro regime facilitated the cross-border trade and received many benefits from this. However, it is rumored that the Saleh brothers are now living in Venezuela and working with a local drug cartel called "Los Leales", which is rumored to have control of the migration route of La Guajira in Colombia.³³

The Nassereddine Clan

The Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned Ghazi Nassereddine in 2008, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began watching him because he was a person of interest.³⁴ His brother, Abdallah Nassereddine, owns numerous properties and centers in Venezuela. They were originally from Lebanon but gained political power in Venezuela under the Hugo Chávez regime. Maduro allowed Ghazi to work in the Foreign Ministry, which gave him diplomatic status and allowed Abdallah to become the regional coordinator for Nueva Esparta State for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.³⁵

Ghazi Nassereddine's position became handy when he was working in the Bolivarian Republic embassy in Damascus, Syria because he set up a meeting with Venezuelan officials and

³³Herrera, Ximena. *Venezuela's Clans Usher Hezbollah in Through the Front Door*. 15 Feb. 2021, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/8940>

³⁴ "Treasury Targets Hizballah in Venezuela," US Department of the Treasury, press release, June 18, 2008, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/pages/hp1036.aspx>

³⁵ *Iran and Hezbollah in the Western Hemisphere*, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, US House of Representatives (2015) (testimony by Joseph M. Humire), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/>.

important Hezbollah members in secret. The meeting was with Hezbollah and Venezuela's Interior Minister, Tareck El Aissami, and the Venezuelan military counterintelligence chief, Hugo Carvajal Barrios. They discussed the cocaine-for-weapon scheme with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Hezbollah, which happened in 2014 when a plane full of weapons (AK-103s) landed on the presidential hangar in Caracas airport.³⁶ The weapons served as payment for the cocaine supplied by FARC to the Maduro regime.

The Nassereddine clan is supposedly still active because they are training individuals and smuggling and trafficking weapons and drugs. Ghazi Nassereddine is no longer a diplomat but runs a Venezuelan think tank called Global AZ and travels to France, Germany, and Italy. Another member of the clan is rumored to be security for Venezuela's current Minister of Petroleum and former Vice President Tareck El Aissami.

In short, the Nassereddine clan is seen as a "super fixer" because they organize and maintain a network in Venezuela that helps Hezbollah work with the Venezuelan government (primarily the Maduro Regime).³⁷ The clan is also able to distance themselves because they have deniability and there is little evidence implicating their illicit activities.

The Rada Clan

The city of Maicao in Colombia has a large Lebanese immigrant population that started to rise in the nineteenth century. Colombia's immigration service deported Venezuelan-Lebanese citizens and Hezbollah financier Abdala Rada Ramel. He was accused of leading a drug-trafficking and contraband-smuggling ring from Maicao to Cartagena.³⁸ Ramel stated in his

³⁶ Humire, Joseph. pg. 8

³⁷ Humire, Joseph. pg. 8

³⁸ Mogollón, Santiago V. *Policía Expulsó Del País Ciudadano Libanés Vinculado Con Narcotráfico*. El Tiempo, 27 Oct. 2017,

interrogation that he was working with a high-level Hezbollah leader named Salman Raouf, who was connected to many terrorist operations throughout the world.³⁹ Additionally, Salman was the coordinator for both bombings against Israel in Buenos Aires, and he continues to lead Hezbollah's crime network in Latin American (mainly Venezuela). The OFAC and Argentina were all looking for him and offered a \$7 million reward on information about his whereabouts. Salman Raouf Salman and his brother Jose Salman El Reda El Reda are acknowledged for creating and establishing Hezbollah's networks in Latin America.

Salama Raouf Salama had connections to Amer Mohamed Akil Rada, who was suspected of the 1994 AMIA attack. Amer Mohamed is also rumored to be involved with the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. He was suspected to be working with Salman Raouf Salam during the 1990s to find locations for Hezbollah's External Security Organization (ESO) in Argentina, Brazil, Colombian, and Venezuela.⁴⁰

After many decades passed, Amer Mohamed Akil Rada created a small import-export business in Panama with textiles for Colombia and charcoal for Lebanon, which 80 percent of the money earned went to fund Hezbollah's agenda.⁴¹ The charcoal in the business exchange was actually "black cocaine" because it made transferring the drug easier. Akil Rada's relatives are still active in Venezuela and are with the Maduro regime on cryptocurrency. However, the regime's crypto chief, Joselit de la Trinidad Ramirez Camacho, is being charged by the

<https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/policia-expulso-del-pais-ciudadano-libanes-vinculado-con-narcotrafico-145546>

³⁹"El Colombiano de Hizbulá," *Semana*, July 7, 2018,

<https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/colombiano-coordinador-del-terrorismo-islamico-en-america-latina/562732/>

⁴⁰ Humire, Joseph. pg. 9

⁴¹George Chaya, "Interpol Detecta Actividades Ilícitas de Hezbollah en Colombia," *Infobae*, April 7, 2018,

<https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2018/04/07/interpol-detecta-actividades-ilicidas-de-hezbollah-en-colombia/>.

Department of Justice (DOJ) and has a \$5 million bounty because he helped the entire regime avoid OFAC sanctions.⁴² This charge showed that Ramirez Camacho formed relationships (social, economic, and political) with drug kingpins.

The Rada, Saleh, and Nassereddine clan are networks that commit illegal activities to help fund and spread the presence of Hezbollah in Latin America. Additionally, the clans are highly protected by the Maduro regime and former regimes because they receive a cut of the money generated. The United States Treasury Department has tabled two members of the clans as global terrorists since they work for Hezbollah. The US-Colombia joint Operation Titan in 2014 highlighted how there are clear connections with Venezuela, Iran, and Hezbollah.

The Tri-Border Area

Geography

The Tri-border area (TBA) is a lawless region where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet, but is grouped by population in aforementioned countries: the Argentine city of Puerto Iguazú, the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu, and the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este (formerly Puerto Presidente Stroessner).⁴³ Brazil and Paraguay wanted to attract more tourists and gain more energy by using Iguassú Falls, which would also help regional trade. The TBA became

⁴² “HSI Adds Venezuelan Official to Most Wanted List, \$5M Reward Offered for Information Leading to His Arrest, Conviction,” US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, press release, June 1, 2020, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/hsi-adds-venezuelan-official-most-wanted-list-5m-reward-offered-information-leading#:~:text=Through%20the%20rewards%20program%2C%20up,kingpins%2C%20including%20Tareck%20EI%20Aissami>.

⁴³ Hudson, Rex., pg. 6, *Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America*. Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, July 2003, www.loc.gov/tr/frd/pdf-files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf

populated with half a million people, and now it continues to serve as the aforementioned lawless region for drug cartels and terrorist groups.

Muslim Population

The TBA is home to the important Arab community in South America. Both Ciudad del Este's and Foz do Iguacu's Arab populations mainly come from Lebanon at 90%.⁴⁴

This community is very close, meaning they have their clubs and schools and live in gated condominiums, so it is hard for outsiders to influence them to a degree. Both cities have become a hub for terrorist or criminal-related groups because those individuals will have alibis from the community, meaning they can plan attacks, but there will be no evidence because "they were home the whole time."

Illegal Activities

Many Islamic terrorist groups (Hezbollah, al Qaeda, Al-Jihad, etc) made the tri-border area their home and the place to execute attacks on the Americas. They can commit many illegal activities because there is little to no military force to deter these organizations. Their activities include recruiting, fundraising, obtaining false citizenship documents, money laundering, drug trafficking, and smuggling weapons into the area, which allows them to be well-financed.

During the middle of-1999, SIDE (Secretariat for State Intelligence) agents began to track terrorist groups in the TBA because there was a rumor that they were conspiring with Osama bin Laden. The agents began to listen to calls from members of extreme organizations occurring in Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguacu to the Middle East. This

⁴⁴ Hudson, Rex., pg. 9

surveillance revealed that al Qaeda operatives were in the TBA and allowed police forces to prevent terrorist attacks on Jewish places in Ciudad del Este, Buenos Aires, and Ottawa, Canada, which were planned by Osama bin Laden and Hezbollah leader Imad Mouniagh to prevent peace initiatives in the Middle East.

A smaller Shi'ite extremist group called the Al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah, or Islamic Resistance, which were a part of Hezbollah, lived in sleeper cells and were used to fight and mobilize the group's and Iran's agenda.⁴⁵ Experts from Brazil and Paraguay became in possession of photographs of extremists at an Al-Mukawama camp in 2000. The photos showed a farm-like area, individuals training with weapons near the Iranian flag, and children learning Hezbollah's ideology.⁴⁶

Drug Trafficking

The TBA is a hotspot for drug trafficking because it is a lawless area with access to over 100 hidden airstrips (many airplanes leave from Paraguay and enter Brazil). Additionally, this area allows others to smuggle drugs (Andean cocaine) through Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, but drug trafficking decreased a bit because of many arrests. However, these illicit activities picked back up after 2000 because of Hezbollah operatives and the Lebanese Mafia. They used the cities of Foz do Iguacu and Ciudad del Este to traffic Colombian cocaine, but caused a member of the Lebanese Mafia to be exposed in January 2003. The operation showed that the ringleader was involved in

⁴⁵ Hudson, Rex, pg. 17-18

⁴⁶ Treverton, Gregory F., et al. pg. 55 "Safety and Justice Program and the Global Risk and Security Center."
<https://Studylib.net/Doc/12406346/Safety-and-Justice-Program-Global-Risk-and-Security-Center-6>, RAND, 2009,
<https://studylib.net/doc/12406346/safety-and-justice-program-global-risk-and-security-center-6>

transporting between 400 and 1,000 kilos of Colombia cocaine per month from Foz do Iguaçu to São Paulo. About 14 men were arrested and the Federal Police believes that the “Barakat Clan” (individuals from the Lebanese Mafia and Hezbollah) were planning on shipping the cocaine to the Middle East and Europe. Additionally, another arrest occurred on May 10, 2003, and he had 2.3 kilos of cocaine.⁴⁷ The police connected his activities and him back to the Barakat Clan and affirmed their belief that Hezbollah has a functioning narco-trafficking department.

A Comparison to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is a lawless region shared between Afghanistan and Pakistan, similarly to the Tri-Border Area. Many individuals believe that this space will become an “epicenter of international terrorism.”⁴⁸ The area is home to about 5 million and comprises fugitives and criminal gangs, who kidnap and traffic drugs and weapons. The territory was used to train Afghan and Arab fighters to attack the Soviets, which was funded by the U.S in the 1980s.⁴⁹ The Soviets withdrew in 1989, but Pakistan’s spy agency continued to train the individuals and spread their influence to Afghanistan. This caused the Afghan Taliban to be revived in 2003 and 2004 in the FATA, which now attacks the U.S. and Afghan coalition troops.⁵⁰ Pakistan tried to stifle the mobilization of some of these groups but ultimately failed. The United States now issues drone strikes against the militants, which has worsened tensions with Pakistan. Overall, it is incredibly difficult to terminate the presence of terrorist groups in

⁴⁷ Hudson, Rex, pg. 26

⁴⁸ Gul, Ayaz. “New Focus on Pakistan's Lawless Border Region.” *Voice of America*, 31 Mar. 2014, www.voanews.com/east-asia/new-focus-pakistans-lawless-border-region#:~:text=With%20a%20population%20of%20around,kidnapping%2C%20trafficking%20drugs%20and%20weapons.

⁴⁹ Gul, Ayaz.

⁵⁰ Gul, Ayaz.

this region because of economic and social problems. However, this threat needs to be addressed because the groups pose a threat to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, which would result in the removal of international forces in Afghanistan immediately. In conclusion, the Taliban is using similar tactics as Hezbollah, in terms of drug and weapons trafficking, to grow and plan future attacks against Afghanistan and the United States.

Attacks Connected to Hezbollah and Iran

Here is a timeline of successful attacks that Hezbollah was able to execute with the financial support from Iran⁵¹:

- 1983: Bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut
- 1983: Bombing of the American Marine barracks in Beirut
- 1984: Attack on the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut
- 198: Hijacking of TWA Flight 847 from Athens to Rome
- 1986: Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia
- 1992: Israeli Embassy bombing in Buenos Aires
- 1994: The AMIA Jewish Community Center bombing in Argentina
- 2005: The assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri
- 2006: Northern Israel border raided and two Israeli soldiers were taken
- 2012: Bombing of Israeli tourist bus in Bulgaria

The following two detailed attacks prove Iran's capability to plan and execute attacks with Hezbollah operatives in Latin America. They remain undetected and have taken the lives of many innocent individuals. Hezbollah and members of the Iranian government that planned and committed these attacks have not been formally charged, therefore, no justice has been served.

⁵¹ Realuyo, Celina B, pp. 119

Bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires

On March 17, 1992, the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed and caused 29 people to die (embassy employees, children, and the elderly).⁵² Additionally, a church was destroyed. Hezbollah immediately took responsibility for the attack, which caused the Argentine Supreme Court to investigate. In May 1999, the Argentinian Supreme Court issued an arrest warrant for Imad Mugnieh, a commander of the Hezbollah military. Additionally, there was an investigation led by Israel, which concluded that high-ranking officials in the Iranian government knew about the attack and advised Hezbollah to execute the operation.⁵³

AMIA Bombing

The Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish center was bombed on July 18, 1994, which resulted in 85 people dead and 150 wounded.⁵⁴ The United States and Israel sent individuals to help conduct investigations, which concluded that the bombing occurred because of a suicide car connected to a Renault Traffic van with 300 to 400 kilograms of explosives.⁵⁵ Additionally, the Argentina federal police used stretches of the suicide bomber to residents to see if anyone saw other perpetrators with the individual. However, their efforts were not done in time

⁵² *Terror Attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires* . Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs , mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Hizbullah/Pages/Terror-attack-Israeli-Embassy-Buenos-Aires-17-Mar-1992.aspx#:~:text=GovXContentSection-,At%2014.45%20on%20March%2017%2C%201992%20a%20powerful%20bomb%20shattered,nearby%20nursing%20home%2C%20and%20schoolchildren.

⁵³ *Terror Attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires*

⁵⁴ Levitt, Matthew. *Iranian and Hezbollah Operation in South America: Then and Now.*, pg. 121, Prism 5, cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-4/Iranian%20and%20Hezbollah.pdf.

⁵⁵ Levitt, Matthew, pg.121

and caused many suspects to flee the country. Also, many members from the Iranian diplomatic support network left weeks before the attack.

The bombing of the AMIA building became part of the plan to bring the revolution aboard. The attack received approval during a meeting from Iran's Supreme National Security Council's department called the Committee for Special Operations. The attendees of the meeting were Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Rafsanjani, Minister of Intelligence Ali Fallahian, Foreign Minister Ali Velayeti, Ahmad Asghari, and a rumored Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps official from the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires and Mohsen Rabbani.⁵⁶

After the meeting, Rabani was promoted to Cultural Attaché at the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires, which gave him diplomatic immunity. He was in charge of the logistics of operation and used Shi'ite supporters to find Jewish and American targets in 1983. Rabbani's surveillance reports show that the AMIA building would be the best option. He was able to receive funds from Iran to execute the plan because he has multiple bank accounts at different locations. Additionally, Hezbollah planned the details of the event in the tri-border area, which was proven through phone calls that took place in a mosque in the city of Iguazu Falls to Iran, the Embassy of Iran in Buenos Aires, the Embassy of Iran in Brasilia, the at-Tauhid mosque in Buenos Aires, and Rabbani's office and home.⁵⁷

Older and Recent Developments (Timeline)

In July 2019, Argentina labeled Hezbollah a terrorist organization and blamed them for the two attacks in Buenos Aires. The government also froze the group's assets in the country.

⁵⁶Levitt, Matthew, pg. 123

⁵⁷ Levitt, Matthew, pg. 123

This news was announced on the 25th anniversary of the bombing at the Jewish community center (AMIA), which resulted in 85 people dead. Hezbollah did not issue a comment.⁵⁸

Iranian General Qassem Soleimani was assassinated on January 3, 2020, by a U.S. airstrike ordered by former President Trump. Soleimani was a big public figure in Iran because he served as the Major General in Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps. After this event, many Iranian officials, such as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Soleimani "the face of international resistance" and that his death will be remembered (meaning retaliation is near).⁵⁹

Hezbollah is the only Shiite militia that has a connection to the Soleimani network that is close to the United States since they have operatives in South America. In September of 2019, a rumored Hezbollah member was arrested because he was surveilling a possible location for the organization to strike in the United States because of former actions by President Trump.⁶⁰ Their anger only intensified after Soleimani's death. Additionally, Sayyed Hassan Nasralla, Secretary-General of Hezbollah, has created a plan that involves Iran-backed militias called the "Resistance Axis" to go against the U.S. military. They want to remove all U.S. bases in the region. In response to this, Iraq's Parliament agreed to and signed a non-binding decision to remove and stop the presence of foreign troops (mainly American) in the country.⁶¹ The State

⁵⁸ Garrison, Cassandra. *Argentina Brands Hezbollah Terrorist Organization, Freezes Assets*. Reuters, 18 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-hezbollah/argentina-brands-hezbollah-terrorist-organization-freezes-assets-idUSKCN1UDIX>

⁵⁹ Vick, Karl. *Why the U.S. Assassination of Iranian Quds Force Leader Qasem Soleimani Has the U.S. Bracing for Retaliation*. Time, 3 Jan. 2020, time.com/5758250/qasem-soleimani-iran-retaliation/.

⁶⁰ Mohamed, Salma. *Hezbollah's Unsettling Presence in South America*. Arab News, 15 Jan. 2020, www.arabnews.com/node/1608786/middle-east.

⁶¹ Azhari, Timour. "Hezbollah Vows Retaliation Against US for Soleimani Killing." *Hezbollah News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 5 Jan. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/5/hezbollah-vows-retaliation-against-us-for-soleimani-killing.

Department and Washington's intelligence community have gathered sufficient evidence proving Hezbollah's criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, in South America and Europe, but little information shows what will happen next.⁶²

In March 2020, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro openly thanked Iran for sending gasoline cargoes to help combat the fuel shortage, which has worsened because of U.S. imposed sanctions. The purpose of sanctions is to force out Maduro, the illegitimate president that was not re-elected in the 2018 election. Also, Colombian President Ivan Duque said that Maduro was considering purchasing missiles from Iran, which he quickly denied. However, in an interview soon after, Maduro said that if it is possible to buy those missiles, he will.⁶³

Around August 2020, Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi told Latin American countries to ban and prevent the future mobilization of Hezbollah in a meeting with the region's ambassadors. He thinks the best way to fight the group's presence is to implement sanctions against them. Their organization is currently banned only in Argentina, Colombia, Honduras, and Guatemala. Additionally, Ashkenazi showed the difference between the Lebanese people that suffered from the Beirut explosion and members of Hezbollah. He believes that it is important to see them as separate and that the innocent Lebanese civilians need humanitarian aid after the explosion.⁶⁴

⁶² Mohamed, Salma

⁶³ Cohen, LucC. *Venezuela's Maduro Thanks Iran for Helping Oil Industry Overcome U.S. Sanctions*. Reuters, 23 Aug. 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-iran/venezuelas-maduro-thanks-iran-for-helping-oil-industry-overcome-u-s-sanctions-idUSKBN25J0M3.

⁶⁴ *Israel FM Urges Latin American Countries to Ban Hezbollah*. Middle East Monitor, 6 Aug. 2020, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200806-israel-fm-urges-latin-american-countries-to-ban-hezbollah/.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution to end transnational crime (drug trafficking) and terrorism in Latin America, is for the United States and other countries with strong military force and presence to send troops to police the area. This effort would be great for the Tri-Border Area since the lawless region allows many illegal activities to occur due to the lack of attention and regional military intervention. The military intervention provided by the United States controlled the issue in Federally Administered Tribal Areas until troops were removed.

Another possible solution would be that the Biden Administration should begin talks with Iran on new nuclear and arms deals that would prevent them from providing weapons to Venezuela and stifle their possession of arms to some degree. This would prevent President Maduro from attacking the United States, other countries, and civilians from Venezuela that disagree with his regime and policies. Additionally, the United States should remove some sanctions from Iran if they progress, meaning they stop providing fuel and other supplies to Venezuela. This most likely would cause President Maduro to resign because his economy would begin to crumble. Another possible option if Maduro still refuses, is that the United States, Iran, and other countries send some troops to help facilitate the process of removing him, instead of just saying the U.S. sides with Juan Guaido (the legitimate president that won the 2018 Venezuelan election)

The other possible option is that the United States should look at Hezbollah facilitators and operatives in Venezuela through the threat convergence theory lens.⁶⁵ The United States needs to threaten their convergence points (where drugs and weapons are trafficked) in Latin America and the rest of the world that Hezbollah, Iran, and Venezuela benefit from economically

⁶⁵ Humire, Joseph. pp. 14

and politically. It is also important to diminish the terrorist groups' presence in Lebanese-dominated areas in Latin America because they are often forced to contribute to the group's illicit activities. Maybe the countries within the region should implement some kind of education policy that teaches said communities about what Hezbollah is doing. Additionally, there should be some kind of protection for these individuals by having more police or enforcement of law patrolling the streets to ensure security when these people refuse to help Hezbollah.

Conclusion

Iran and Hezbollah have infiltrated the region of Latin America because of the Islamic Revolution, the Lebanese Civil War, and isolation from the international community inflicted by the United States. Additionally, Iran has created deep financial ties with many countries, such as Venezuela and by supporting oil production, which helps Bolivia and Ecuador. Many Iranian presidents made Latin America a priority in terms of foreign policy, so local governments have given government positions and residency papers to Iran and members of Hezbollah and have also provided additional connections to local terrorists and drug organizations. Their activities combined have generated millions of dollars by smuggling, arming, and training civilians from Latin America and the Middle East for both Iran and Latin American countries involved. With these facts presented, lawmakers need to address this threat because their activities include terrorist attacks, money laundering, and collusion with governments. All of these illicit activities cause destabilization in regions or countries because many lives are put at risk. It is time for other countries to help areas, such as Latin America, to combat and end terrorism.

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