



Terror Can Leak In Through America's Borders

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Late last month, the State Department submitted its long-awaited report to Congress on Iran's activities in Latin America. That study, mandated as part of the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act signed into law by President Obama last year, was designed to provide an in-depth look at Iran's growing operations south of the U.S. border and to present a strategy to confront its growing influence.

But the report does little of the sort. Rather, it contends that, in the main, Iran's activities in Latin America are nothing to worry about. According to the *Washington Times*, the study – which remains mostly classified – concludes that "Iran is not supporting active terrorist cells in the Western Hemisphere" and that the Iranian regime "has far less influence and activities" in the region than commonly believed.

This represents a dangerous misreading of Iran's threat potential in the Americas. First, while it is true that comparatively few Iranian-sponsored attacks have come to fruition in the Western Hemisphere to date, the danger is far from negligible. In fact, Iran has attempted to attack the U.S. homeland at least twice in the last decade: in 2007, when Guyanese national Abdul Kadir attempted to blow up fuel tanks at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport, and again in October 2011, when U.S. law enforcement authorities thwarted a plot by Iran's Revolutionary Guards to assassinate Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, Adel al-Jubeir, at a D.C. restaurant.

Moreover, these attempts were made possible by an extensive Iranian terrorist network in the region – one far greater than commonly understood. Just how extensive is outlined in painstaking detail in the most recent report of Alberto Nisman, the Argentine state prosecutor tasked with investigating the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israel Mutual Association in Buenos Aires. Nisman identifies a continent-wide network of intelligence bases and logistical support centers spanning no fewer than eight countries, and which – while instrumental in the AMIA attack – remains operational today.

At the center of this web is one Mohsen Rabbani, a former Iranian businessman and cultural attaché to Argentina who masterminded the AMIA bombing. But Rabbani has done much more, cultivating a generation of disciples in the region who have helped spread Iran's influence through informal contacts and influence operations. He has done so with considerable success; Iran's agents of influence, Nisman documents, now operate in Chile, Brazil, Bolivia and numerous other places in the Americas, where they proselytize and build support for the Islamic Republic among regional populations.

Iran is also active on other fronts, from diplomatic contacts with sympathetic regimes to mineral extraction to bonds with various regional paramilitary forces. And while these contacts are still comparatively modest in nature, they are decidedly not in decline. Rather, along every prong of its outreach to the Americas, the Iranian regime is objectively maintaining, if not expanding, its level of activity.

The State Department's assessment is vastly at odds with this reality – and even with judgments from other parts of the U.S. government itself. To wit, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before Congress last year that Iran's regional alliances "can pose an immediate threat by giving Iran – directly through the IRGC, the Qods force, or its proxies like Hezbollah – a platform in the region to carry out attacks against the United States, our interests, and allies." And Michael Leiter, the former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, told the House Homeland Security Committee last week that Iran represents a threat to the U.S. through our porous borders, and that there are Hezbollah and Revolutionary Guard operatives active within the U.S. today.

These divergent views speak volumes about the need for a comprehensive, informed official picture of Iran's presence, and its objectives, in the Americas. Only when the U.S. government has one can it truly do what lawmakers have demanded and craft a strategy capable of countering Iran's inroads in our hemisphere.

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