

TESTIMONY OF
AMBASSADOR ROGER F. NORIEGA
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NON-PROLIFERATION AND TRADE

“Hezbollah’s Strategic Shift: A Global Terrorist Threat”

1:30 PM, Wednesday, March 20, 2012
2172 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

Mr. Chairman, I applaud you and other members of the Subcommittee for focusing attention on the global threat posed by the terrorist group Hezbollah and for inviting me to share my insights on that organization’s growing network in the Americas that carries this threat to our doorstep.

This past weekend marked the ^{21st}~~31st~~ anniversary of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which murdered 29 people and injured about 250 others. Two years after that attack, the Jewish Community Center in Argentina’s capital city was leveled by another car bomb, leaving 85 persons murdered and hundreds more wounded. Mr. Chairman, this is Hezbollah’s despicable legacy in the Americas. And that terrorist group – along with its sponsor, Iran – has returned to the scene of the crime.

As a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, I head a project to examine and expose the dangerous alliance between the Venezuelan regime of Hugo Chávez and Iran. To date, we have conducted dozens of interviews with experts and eyewitnesses on the ground – including some foreign government officials – from throughout the world and in the region. We also have obtained reams of official Venezuelan and Iranian documents from our sources inside these regimes, only a fraction of which we have published to support our conclusions.

Our principal conclusions reveal why and how Hezbollah has extended its reach in the Americas so substantially and so quickly:

- Hezbollah is not a lone wolf. In this Hemisphere it counts on the political, diplomatic, material and logistical support of governments – principally Venezuela and Iran – that have little in common but their hostility to the United States.

Roger F. Noriega was U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States from 2001-03 and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State from 2003-05. He is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, managing director of Vision Americas LLC, which represents U.S. and foreign clients, and contributor to www.interamericansecuritywatch.com.

- To facilitate its activities in our neighborhood – including smuggling, money laundering, training and fund-raising – Hezbollah operatives collaborate with well-financed narcotraffickers and guerrilla groups with sophisticated societal, smuggling and money laundering networks in the region.
- Hezbollah networks have extended their reach into at least a dozen countries throughout Latin America.

Some may assess this cooperation between “narcos” and terrorists as a marriage of convenience between different criminal elements or just another *modus operandi* of powerful international drug syndicates that can be tackled by law enforcement. Instead, this criminal activity is the product of a conscious strategy of rogue regimes in Iran and Venezuela to wage asymmetrical warfare against U.S. security, interests and allies close to the homeland. As such, it requires a much more robust analysis and coordinated response – from exposing terrorist groups working within Venezuela, identifying narcoterrorist activities in Central America, imposing sanctions against state-run entities being used to conceal criminal transactions, to dismantling transnational money laundering schemes.

Under bipartisan legislation passed by Congress in December, the Department of State was given six months to provide you with an analysis of and strategy for dealing with Iran’s activities in the Americas. Until now, the State Department has earned a reputation within the U.S. government of minimizing this threat. This Subcommittee will have to press the Department to conduct a thorough and rigorous review of the Iranian and Hezbollah activities in our region and to expose the extraordinary role that is played by Venezuela in this regard. U.S. diplomats will then have to inform our neighbors about this problem and lay the groundwork for a coordinated strategy for dealing with this phenomenon in our Hemisphere.

Mr. Chairman, I fear that these narcoterrorist activities will exact an increasingly terrible price from our neighbors and our nation until our national security establishment recognizes the nature of the threat and fashions an effective response.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Allow me to describe some of the elements of this narcoterrorist network, followed by a fuller discussion to provide the necessary context to understand why this threat is extraordinarily dangerous.

- **Two terrorist networks proselytize, fund-raise, recruit and train operatives on behalf of Hezbollah in many countries in the Americas.**
 - One of these parallel networks is operated by a Lebanese-Venezuelan clan, and another is managed by **Mohsen Rabbani**, a former Iranian diplomat and Muslim cleric who is wanted for his role in the 1992 and

- 1994 Buenos Aires bombings against the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community center, respectively.
- **Hezbollah operatives and their radical anti-Semitic allies hold important senior positions in the Venezuelan government** and run a network that provides logistical and material support to terrorist operatives.
 - In recent years, **the Chávez regime has sent weapons to Hezbollah** (ammunition, grenades, rockets, etc., intercepted in 2009 by Israeli commandos)ⁱ and shipped refined fuel to Iran and Syriaⁱⁱ.
 - Thousands of **authentic Venezuelan travel documents have been provided to persons of Middle Eastern descent** in the last decade, and numerous Latin American governments have detained many Iranian and Lebanese persons carrying Venezuelan passports.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - The Venezuelan state-owned airline, **Conviasa**, operates regular service from Caracas to Damascus and Teheran – providing Iran, Hezbollah, and associated narcotraffickers a surreptitious **means to move personnel, weapons, contraband and other materiel.**
- **Hezbollah conspires with drug-trafficking networks** in Mexico and Central and South America as a means of raising and laundering funds, sharing tactics and “reaching out and touching” U.S. territory.
 - **Venezuela’s Margarita Island**, best known as a Caribbean tourist destination, has become a **safe haven** for terrorists and drug smugglers. We have published documentary evidence that **Hezbollah agents operate numerous businesses and safe houses on the island and elsewhere in Venezuela.** In addition to fund-raising activities, Hezbollah has provided terror training in Venezuela for recruits from that country and others in the region.
 - The “Lebanese Cartel” (*Cártel Libanés*) was formed by the Lebanese-born Venezuelan businessman, Walid Makled García, to transport cocaine from Venezuela in complicity with the military and the Colombian terrorist group known as the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*). Makled also brokered corrupt deals with the Shiite Muslim communities in Venezuela with close ties to Hezbollah.^{iv} Makled is wanted in the United States for cocaine smuggling and has been detained by Venezuelan authorities.
 - The criminal case against Lebanese drug lord **Ayman Jouma** is very instructive. Jouma was indicted in November 2011 for a sophisticated cocaine smuggling and money-laundering scheme benefiting Hezbollah.^v His network involves criminal associates and corrupt businesses in Colombia, the United States, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Lebanon. In June 2012, Venezuelan-Lebanese dual citizens Abbas Hussein Harb, Ali Houssein Harb (*sic*), and Kassem Mohamad Saleh and several Venezuelan and Colombian companies were sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department for their role in Jouma’s narcoterrorist operation.^{vi}

- In recent years, **Mexico has arrested numerous individuals associated with Hezbollah** engaging in criminal activities – including smuggling of persons across the U.S. southwest border.^{vii} For example, in September 2012, a Lebanese-born U.S. citizen, convicted in 2010 for a credit card scheme that raised \$100,000 for Hezbollah, was arrested in Merida by Mexican authorities. Rafic Mohammad Labboun Allaboun, an imam from a mosque in San Jose, California, was traveling with a falsified passport issued by Belize. He was extradited to the United States.^{viii}
- **The regime of the late Hugo Chávez was able to broker ties between Hezbollah and narcotraffickers, because it is a narcostate.**
 - U.S. officials have fresh, compelling information implicating the late leader, the president of the National Assembly (Diosdado Cabello Rondón), the former Minister of Defense (Henry de Jesús Rangel Silva), the current army chief (Cliver Alcalá Cordones), and the newly appointed deputy Minister of Interior (Hugo Carvajal), and dozens of other senior military officials in trafficking in cocaine.
 - These politicians and active duty and retired military officers are responsible for transporting tons of cocaine to Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, the United States, west Africa, and Europe. The very conservative estimates released by the State Department say the amount of cocaine transiting Venezuela since Chávez took power in 1998 has more than doubled.^{ix}
 - **Our sources also report that representatives of the Mexican Sinaloa cartel operate in key cocaine transit corridors in Venezuela in close coordination with Venezuelan officials.** It is a little known fact that the world's most powerful cocaine smuggler and head of the **Sinaloa cartel, Joaquín Archivaldo “El Chapo” Guzmán conducted his business from Venezuela for much of 2010**, living in a suburb of Caracas and on Margarita Island until early 2011 under the protection of Venezuelan security officials working for Chávez.
 - Senior *chavista* officials engage routinely in lucrative schemes involving Hezbollah front companies, Colombian terrorist groups, narcotraffickers, Venezuelan financial institutions and even powerful state-run entities.
- **Today, Venezuela is a key ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is carrying its asymmetrical battle to our doorstep.** Since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid his first visit to Caracas in September 2006, Venezuela has become one of Iran's most important allies in the world – certainly Teheran's closest partner in our neighborhood.
 - Venezuela has helped Iran launder at least \$30 billion to evade international sanctions. Seventy Iranian companies – many of them fronts for the IRGC that have been sanctioned by Western governments for their support for Iran's illicit nuclear program – operate suspicious industrial facilities in Venezuela. The two governments also cooperate in nuclear technology and the exploration for uranium, despite UN sanctions.

DISCUSSION AND BACKGROUND

VENEZUELA'S HEZBOLLAH-NARCO NEXUS

It is said that wherever Iran goes, Hezbollah is not far behind. In the case of Venezuela, Hezbollah blazed the trail in Venezuela, establishing a network of commercial enterprises meant to raise and channel funds and hide its financial tracks. These activities have exploded in the last seven years, as Hezbollah's activities in the region gained the active complicity of the Venezuelan government, the backing of Iranian security forces and notorious Muslim radicals, and the cooperation of powerful Mexican and narco-trafficking syndicates that reach onto U.S. soil.

Research from open sources, subject-matter experts, and sensitive sources within various governments has identified at least two parallel, collaborative terrorist networks growing at an alarming rate in Latin America. One of these networks is operated by Venezuelan collaborators, and the other is managed by a former Iranian diplomat and infamous Muslim cleric. These networks encompass more than 80 operatives in at least 12 countries throughout the region (with their greatest areas of focus being Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and Chile).

The Nassereddine Network. Ghazi Atef Nassereddine Abu Ali, a native of Lebanon who became a Venezuelan citizen about 12 years ago, is Venezuela's second-ranking diplomat in Syria. Nassereddine is a key Hezbollah asset because of his close personal relationship to Chávez's Justice and Interior Minister, Tarik El Aissami, and because of his diplomatic assignment in Damascus. Along with at least two of his brothers, Nassereddine manages a network to expand Hezbollah's influence in Venezuela and throughout Latin America.

Nassereddine's brother Abdallah, a former member of the Venezuelan congress, uses his position as the former vice president of the Federation of Arab and American Entities in Latin America and the president of its local chapter in Venezuela to maintain ties with Islamic communities throughout the region.^x He currently resides on Margarita Island, where he runs various money-laundering operations and manages commercial enterprises associated with Hezbollah in Latin America. Younger brother Oday is responsible for establishing paramilitary training centers on Margarita Island. He is actively recruiting Venezuelans through local *circulos bolivarianos* (neighborhood watch committees made up of the most radical Chávez followers) and sending them to Iran for follow-on training.

The Rabbani Network. Hojjat al-Eslam Mohsen Rabbani, who was the cultural attaché at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Buenos Aires, Argentina, oversees a parallel Hezbollah recruitment network.^{xi} Rabbani is currently the international affairs advisor to the Al-Mostafa Al-Alam Cultural Institute in Qom, which is tasked with propagation of Shia Islam outside Iran.^{xii} Rabbani, referred to by the

important Brazilian magazine *Veja* as “the Terrorist Professor,”^{xiii} is a die-hard defender of the Iranian revolution and the mastermind behind the two notorious terrorist attacks against Jewish targets in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994 that killed 144 people.^{xiv}

At the time, Rabbani was credentialed as Iran’s cultural attaché in the Argentine capital, which he used as a platform for extremist propaganda, recruitment and training that culminated in the attacks in the 1990s. In fact, he continues to exploit that network of Argentine converts today to expand Iran’s and Hezbollah’s reach—identifying and recruiting operatives throughout the region for radicalization and terrorist training in Venezuela and Iran (specifically, the city of Qom).

At least two mosques in Buenos Aires—Al Imam and At-Tauhid—are operated by Rabbani disciples. Sheik Abdallah Madani leads the Al Imam mosque, which also serves as the headquarters for the Islamic-Argentine Association, one of the most prominent Islamic cultural centers in Latin America.

Some of Rabbani’s disciples have taken what they have learned from their mentor in Argentina and replicated it elsewhere in the region. Sheik Karim Abdul Paz, an Argentine convert to Shiite Islam, studied under Rabbani in Qom for five years and succeeded him at the At-Tauhid mosque in Buenos Aires in 1993.^{xv} Abdul Paz is now the imam of a cultural center in Santiago, Chile, the Centro Chileno Islamico de Cultura de Puerto Montt. Another Argentine convert to radical Islam and Rabbani disciple is Sheik Suhail Assad, who lectures at universities throughout the region and recruits young followers to the cause.^{xvi}

A key target of the Rabbani network—and Hezbollah in general—is Brazil, home to some one million Muslims. Rabbani travels to Brazil regularly to visit his brother, Mohammad Baquer Rabbani Razavi, founder of the Iranian Association in Brazil.^{xvii} Another of his principal collaborators is Sheik Khaled Taki Eldyn, a Sunni radical from the Sao Paulo Guarulhos mosque. Taki Eldyn, who is active in ecumenical activities with the Shia mosques, also serves as the secretary general of the Council of the Leaders of the Societies and Islamic Affairs of Brazil.^{xviii} A sensitive source linked that mosque to a TBA network cited by the US Treasury Department as providing major financial and logistical support to Hezbollah.^{xix} As far back as 1995, Taki Eldyn hosted al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed in the TBA region.

According to Brazilian intelligence sources cited by the magazine *Veja*, at least 20 operatives from Hezbollah, al Qaeda and the Islamic Jihad are using Brazil as a hub for terrorist activity.^{xx} The fact that Brazil is set to host the FIFA World Cup tournament in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016 makes it an inviting target for international terrorism. U.S. officials should be approaching Brazilian officials to discuss the potential threat of Venezuelan-Iranian support for narcoterrorism. Unfortunately, most U.S. diplomats are as indifferent to this reality as their Brazilian counterparts.

IRAN'S DANGEROUS GAMBIT IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

To comprehend what Iran is up to, we must set aside conventional wisdom about its ambitions, strategies and tactics and follow the evidence where it leads. For example, in the aftermath of a brazen plot discovered in October 2011 in which Iranian agents conspired with supposed Mexican drug cartel leaders to commit a terrorist bombing in the heart of our Nation's capital,^{xxi} Director of National Intelligence, James R. Clapper, revealed that "Iranian officials" at the highest levels "are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States...." General Clapper also reported that Iran's so-called "supreme leader" Ali Khamenei was probably aware of this planning.^{xxii}

Iranian officials have made no secret of the regime's intention to carry its asymmetrical struggle to the streets of the United States. For example, in a May 2011 speech in Bolivia, Iran's Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi promised a "tough and crushing response" to any U.S. offensive against Iran.^{xxiii} At the same time that Iran caught the world's attention by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced a five-nation swing through Latin America aimed at advancing its influence and operational capabilities on the U.S. doorstep.^{xxiv}

The intelligence community's fresh assessment of Iran's willingness to wage an attack on our soil leads to the inescapable conclusion that Teheran's activities near our homeland constitute a very real threat that can no longer be ignored.

Bracing for a potential showdown over its illicit nuclear program and emboldened by inattention from Washington in Latin America, Iran has sought strategic advantage in our neighborhood. It also is preparing to play the narcoterrorism card—exploiting its partnership with Venezuelan operatives, reaching into Mexico, and activating a decades-old network in Argentina, Brazil and elsewhere in the region.

Today, a shadowy network of embassies, Islamic centers, financial institutions, and commercial and industrial enterprises in several countries affords Iran a physical presence in relatively close proximity to the United States. Iran is well-positioned to use its relationships with these countries to pose a direct threat to U.S. territory, strategic waterways and American allies. Iran also has provided the Venezuelan military with weapon systems that gave Venezuela unprecedented capabilities to threaten its neighbors and the United States.

Notably, a half-dozen Iranian companies sanctioned by U.N., U.S. or European authorities have built suspicious industrial installations at various sites in Venezuela.^{xxv} These facilities were important enough to attract secret visits by Iranian Major General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the Revolutionary Guard Corps aerospace commander who previously headed Iran's missile program, in July 2009 and November 2011.

VENEZUELA'S PIVOTAL ROLE SUPPORTING IRAN AND TERRORISM

In recent congressional testimony, investigative journalist Doug Farah describes “the merging of [Hugo Chávez’s] Bolivarian Revolution’s criminal-terrorist pipeline activities and those of the criminal-terrorist pipeline of radical extremist groups (Hezbollah in particular) supported by the Iranian regime.”^{xxvi} Such ties are invaluable to groups like Hezbollah, as they afford them protection, safe havens in which to operate, and even diplomatic status and immunity. In short, Venezuela plays a singular role as a platform for the Hezbollah threat in the Americas.

It is important to bear in mind that Venezuela is not just another developing country that is unable to control its territory. Venezuela is an oil-rich state that has collected about \$1.1 trillion in oil revenue in the last decade. It also is not just an isolated hostile state: Venezuela has collected \$28 billion in loans from China in the last two years, and has purchased at least \$9 billion in arms from the Russians in the last decade.^{xxvii}

With the success of the U.S.-backed Plan Colombia, about six or seven years ago, South American narcotraffickers had to adjust their smuggling routes. They had to look no farther than Caracas. Chávez doled out lucrative drug trafficking deals as a means to secure the loyalty of military subordinates and to generate billions in revenue and make them complicit in his corrupt regime. As described above, dozens of senior military officials closely associated with Chávez have been implicated in narcotrafficking crimes. The *de facto* head of the Venezuelan *Cártel del Sol* is Diosdado Cabello, National Assembly president and ruling party chief.

That military syndicate operates parallel to a civilian network known as the *Cártel Libanés*, which was formed by the Lebanese-born Walid Makled García. According to journalist and narcoterror expert, Douglas Farah, “The supplier of the cocaine [to the Makled cartel] was the FARC in Colombia...” Farah’s sources also reported that Makled was a key link between various criminal groups and Venezuela’s Shiite Muslim communities that have a strong financial relationship with Hezbollah.^{xxviii} Makled is wanted in the United States for cocaine smuggling; after being detained in Colombia, he gave a series of media interviews implicating dozens of Venezuela officials in cocaine smuggling. Colombia surprised many observers by extraditing Makled to Venezuela, where his closed-door trial began in April 2012.^{xxix}

Even before Chávez won power in 1998, he established intimate links to the Colombian guerrilla group FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*) – which wages a terrorist war against a democratic government and ally of the United States. For many years, FARC commanders and troops have operated in and out of Venezuela with the complicity of the Chávez regime. A principal activity of the FARC today is the transportation of cocaine to safe havens operated by the Venezuelan military for transport to the United States and other countries.

In September 2012, pursuant to section 706(2)(A) of the Foreign Relations

Authorization Act of 2003, President Obama determined that Venezuela was one of three countries in the world (along with Bolivia and Burma) that “failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements....”^{xxx}

Venezuela’s internal security apparatus has been organized and directed by Cuba, a country designated by the U.S. State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism. That same report cited Venezuela’s “economic, financial and diplomatic cooperation with Iran....”^{xxxii} Chávez’s aides make no secret of ongoing oil shipments to a third terrorist state, Syria. Just as Hezbollah, Cuba, Syria and Iran are considered terrorist threats to U.S. national security interests, Venezuela’s crucial support for each of them should be, too. Although this support may not pose a classical conventional threat, it is precisely the kind of asymmetrical tactics that our enemies favor today.

The *chavista* regime also has served as the principal interlocutor on Iran’s behalf with other like-minded heads of state in the region, primarily Rafael Correa (of Ecuador) and Evo Morales (of Bolivia), both members of the Chávez-sponsored Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and both of whom have established dubious networks with criminal transnational groups.^{xxxiii}

CONTINUED CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRED

Mr. Chairman, our project has shared substantial information about these aforementioned threats with U.S. government officials—either directly or through Members of Congress. Too often the attitude we have encountered in the executive branch has been one of skepticism or indifference. Apparently, this indifference has left senior U.S. officials uninformed on the subject. For example, President Obama told a Miami journalist in July 2012, “[M]y sense is that what Mr. Chávez has done over the last several years has not had a serious national security impact on us.” U.S. General Douglas Fraser (USAF), the former regional commander of U.S. Southern Command, subsequently supported the appraisal that Venezuela does not represent a threat to U.S. national security.^{xxxiv} “As I look at Iran and their connection with Venezuela,” said Fraser, “I see that still primarily as a diplomatic and economic relationship.”

Mr. Chairman, I believe the foregoing discussion of the facts on the ground will lead most reasonable observers to a very different conclusion. Important exceptions to executive branch neglect is the work of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the Department of the Treasury to sanction numerous Venezuelan officials and entities for their complicity with and support for Iran and international terrorism; in addition, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Preet Bharara, has investigated and prosecuted key cases to attack this international conspiracy. Inexplicably, according to law enforcement sources, State Department officers systematically resist the application of sanctions against Venezuelan officials and entities, despite the fact that these suspects are playing an increasingly important role in Iran’s operational capabilities near U.S. territory.

Mr. Chairman, I am convinced that Congressional attention, such as this hearing, is essential to encourage Executive branch agencies to act. For example, sanctions against Venezuela's state-owned petroleum company for transactions with Iran were the direct result of pressure by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, acting in part on information uncovered by AEI's project.

As I mentioned earlier, the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012," authored by Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC), passed with strong bipartisan support, require the Executive branch to report to Congress on Iran's activities in a host of areas and to provide a strategy for countering this threat.

I believe that such a thorough, Congressionally-mandated review will require the Executive branch to apply additional needed intelligence resources to collect on subject matters in Venezuela, Mexico, Bolivia, Ecuador, Central America and beyond. Once national security officials study the scope and depth of the problem, I hope for a whole-of-government response to protect our security, our interests and our allies against the threat posed by a narcoterrorist network in the Americas. Once Congress receives this report, perhaps this challenge will be treated as a budgetary priority so that law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the resources to respond urgently and effectively. Of course, our project at AEI is prepared to cooperate with this policy review by providing the Subcommittee documents and analysis regarding suspicious transactions and installations operated by Iran in Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia and elsewhere in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The involvement of Venezuelan officials and state-run entities in drug trafficking, terrorism and/or Iran must be on the table as the State Department presents conditions for normalizing bilateral relations with Chávez's successor. In the mean time, this involvement must be publicized and punished in the form of federal indictments. Sanctions by the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control are good interim measures. However, in the case of Venezuelan officials and state-run entities, indictments are much more meaningful. The Department of Justice headquarters should be asked to explain why such prosecutorial actions have failed to meet this extraordinary lawlessness.
- Congress should demand U.S. diplomats be more cooperative with law enforcement and intelligence efforts aimed at exposing and punishing criminal behavior and terrorist activities in the region. Specifically, the Department of State must be more cooperative in raising this phenomenon with our neighbors. We also must find a way to talk about this problem with our friends in a way that it is not misunderstood as an accusation against those governments as they work with us to confront the problem.

- Congress should give U.S. intelligence and security agencies the resources required to expand their capabilities to confront extra-regional threats and cross-border criminality.
- U.S. national security agencies, led by the Department of State, should increase the dialogue and cooperation with regional and European military, intelligence, and security agencies on the common threat posed by the Hezbollah-Iranian-Venezuelan alliance.
- Congress should use its oversight functions to determine if U.S. Northern and Southern Commands, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Drug Enforcement Administration have adequate programs and funding to support U.S. anti-drug cooperation with Mexico and Central America.

CONCLUSION

As I stated before another Congressional subcommittee nearly two years ago, the “Hezbollah/Iranian presence in Latin America constitutes a clear threat to the security of the U.S. homeland.... In addition to operational terrorist activity, Hezbollah also is immersed in criminal activity throughout the region – from trafficking in weapons, drugs, and persons.... If our government and responsible partners in Latin America fail to act, I believe there will be an attack on U.S. personnel, installations or interests in the Americas...” as a result of this dangerous conspiracy.

The narcoterrorism on our doorstep, perpetrated by Hezbollah with Iranian and Venezuelan support, demands a response from those whose job it is to keep us safe. Our government must take effective measures—unilaterally and with willing partners—to disrupt and dismantle illicit operations and neutralize unacceptable threats.

ⁱ <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/05/world/fg-israel-arms-boat5>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/world/americas/chavez-appears-to-use-venezuelan-fuel-to-help-syrias-assad.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ One of the 9/11 attackers had ties to a man traveling on an *authentic* Venezuelan passport bearing the name “Hakim Mohamed Ali Diab Fattah.” Diab Fattah was detained by the FBI and deported to Venezuela; when the FBI asked the Venezuelan government for access to this man, authorities there claimed that he never entered the country.

^{iv} “The Further Narco-Terrorist Ties of the Chávez Government,” by Douglas Farah, November 12, 2010. <http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/543/the-further-narco-terrorist-ties-of-the-chavez-government>

^v “Ties Between Hezbollah and Mexican Drug Cartels Revealed,” by Rebecca Anna Stoil, *The Jerusalem Post*, December 15, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=249684>

^{vi} “Treasury Targets Major Money Laundering Network Linked to Drug Trafficker Ayman Joumaa and a Key Hizballah Supporter in South America,” U.S. Department of the Treasury

press release, June 27, 2012. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1624.aspx>

^{vii} “Exclusive: Hezbollah Uses Mexican Drug Routes into the U.S.,” *Washington Times*, March 27, 2009.

^{viii} “Mexico Extradites Suspected Hezbollah Member,” September 11, 2012.

<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/09/11/mexico-extradites-suspected-hezbollah-member/>

^{ix} International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2013, U.S. Department of State, March 3, 2013. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2013/vol1/204052.htm#Venezuela>

^x This organization was founded in Argentina in 1972 to unite Muslims, namely the Syrian and Lebanese communities, in Latin America and has spread rapidly throughout Latin America, with offices in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Guadalupe Island, Antigua, and Uruguay. It is overtly anti-Israel; supportive of anti-American regimes in the Middle East and Latin America; and used as a platform for Hezbollah to raise money, recruit supporters, and solicit illegal visas.

^{xi} “Reis-Jomhour-e Arzhantin Dar Sazeman-e Melal: Tehran Ba Mohakemeh-ye Maqamatash Dar Keshvar-e Sales Movafeqat Konad” [The President of Argentina: Tehran Should Accept Trial of Its Authorities in a Third Country], *Asr-e Iran (Tehran)*, September 25, 2010, www.asriran.com (available in Persian, accessed September 29, 2011).

^{xii} “Din va Siasat Dar Amrika-ye Latin Dar Goftegu Ba Ostad Mohsen Rabbani” [Religion and Politics in Latin America in Conversation with Professor Mohsen Rabbani], *Book Room (Tehran)*, May 3, 2010.

^{xiii} “The Terrorist ‘Professor,’” *Veja (Brazil)*, April 20, 2011.

^{xiv} Marcelo Martinez Burgos and Alberto Nissman, Office of Criminal Investigations: AMIA Case (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Investigations Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, 2006), www.peaceandtolerance.org/docs/nismanindict.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011). Eight Iranian officials are considered fugitives by Interpol for their role in the Argentina attacks, including Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (former Iranian president); Ali Fallahijan (former Intelligence minister); Ali Akbar Velayati (former Foreign Affairs minister); Mohsen Rezai (former head of the Revolutionary Guards Pasdaran); current Defense minister Ahmad Vahidi; Mohsen Rabbani (former Cultural affairs officer at the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires); Ahmad Reza Asghari (former third secretary at the Iran embassy in Buenos Aires); and Hadi Soleimanpour (former Ambassador in Argentina). <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/06/19/jewish-centre-asks-for-arrest-of-iranian-terrorist-suspects-if-they-attend-rio-20>

^{xv} “Goftegu Ba Sarkar-e Khanom-e Ma’soumeh As’ad Paz Az Keshvar-e Arzhantin” [Conversation with Lade Ma’soumeh As’ad Paz From Argentina], *Ahlulbayt (Tehran)*, June 13, 2011.

^{xvi} Marielos Márquez, “‘El Islam es una forma de vida’: Sheij Suhail Assad,” *DiarioCoLatino*, August 27, 2007.

^{xvii} “Sourat-e Jalaseh” [Agenda], *Iranianbrazil (Brazil)*, March 17, 2010.

^{xviii} “Aein-ha-ye Ramezani Dar Berezil” [Ramadan Traditions in Brazil], *Taghrib News (Qom)*, September 5, 2010.

^{xix} US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates Islamic Extremist, Two Companies Supporting Hizballah in Tri-Border Area,” news release, June 10, 2004.

^{xx} “The Terrorist ‘Professor,’” *Veja (Brazil)*, April 20, 2011.

^{xxi} “Notorious Iranian Militant has a Connection to Alleged Assassination Plot Against Saudi Envoy, by Peter Finn, *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2011.

^{xxii}

^{xxiii} “Sanction shows US weakness, says Iran minister,” *Iranian Students' News Agency*, June 1, 2011; “Iran Warns of Street War in Tel Aviv If Attacked,” *Fars News Agency*, November 8,

2011.

^{xxiv} “Iran Seeking to Expand Influence in Latin America,” by Joby Warrick, *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2012.

^{xxv} Iranian companies sanctioned on repeated occasions by the U.S Treasury, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, the U.N. Security Council (United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1747, 1803, 1929), the European Union (2008, 2010, 2011), the United Kingdom (2007,2008), Germany (2005), and Japan.

^{xxvi} Douglas Farah, “Hezbollah in Latin America: Implications for U.S. Security,” Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, July 7, 2011, www.homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Farah.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011).

^{xxvii} In the last four years, the Russians have sold at least \$9 billion in arms to Venezuela and has constructed a factory in Maracay, Venezuela, that can produce about 25,000 assault rifles per year. The latest \$4 billion Russian line of credit announced in June 2012 will go toward arming chavista militias – shock troops loyal to the regime and meant to intimidate the opposition.

^{xxviii} “The Further Narco-Terrorist Ties of the Chávez Government,” by Douglas Farah, November 12, 2010. <http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/543/the-further-narco-terrorist-ties-of-the-chavez-government>

^{xxix} “5 Things to Watch for in Venezuelan Kingpin Walid Makled’s Trial,” by Elyssa Pachico, *Latin America Monitor*, July 31, 2012. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2012/0731/5-things-to-watch-for-in-Venezuelan-kingpin-Walid-Makled-s-trial>

^{xxx} See the September 14, 2012, Presidential Memorandum at this site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/14/presidential-memorandum-presidential-determination-annual-presidential-d>.

^{xxxi} <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195546.htm>

^{xxxii} José R. Cárdenas, “The Chávez Model Threatens Ecuador,” *AEI Latin American Outlook* (March 2011), www.aei.org/outlook/101037; Douglas Farah, *Into the Abyss: Bolivia under Evo Morales and the MAS* (Alexandria, VA: International Assessment and Strategy Center, 2009), www.strategycenter.net/files/2011/10/06/20090618_IASCIntoTheAbyss061709.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011).

^{xxxiii} “Top U.S. General: Venezuela not a Threat,” by Frank Bajak, *The Associated Press*, July 31, 2012. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/top-us-general-venezuela-not-threat>