

Iran and Latin America: The Media States Its Case

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Should the United States be concerned about Iran's determined efforts to reach out to Latin America? Or, as was suggestively described in the Economist, by the Ayatollahs' strategy of cozying up to Latin America?

The US continues to see the world as its own business. It gives itself and its allies, most notably Israel, the right to geopolitical maneuverability. Iran, on the other hand, is censured, derided and punished for even its own internal policies, within its own borders. Thus, an Iranian move into Latin America is naturally viewed as unwarranted, uncalled for and most definitely dangerous as far as the US is concerned.

But Iran is not invading America geopolitical space per se. It is neither financing a terrorist group, nor involved in the ongoing narcotic war. More, there is no historical connection between an interventionist Iran and the bloody past of Latin America, including its former dictators and brutal juntas. In fact, Iran's 'cozying up' to Latin America merely began in 2005. Since then, Iran has opened embassies in several Latin American countries and launched important joint projects that provided funds and work opportunities for thousands of ordinary people. There is no Iranian equivalent to the School of the Americas.

So why the alarm?

Paul McLeary of Aviation Week gives us a clue. Iran's move "has set off a proxy conflict between Iran and Israel in South America, with the presidents of both countries logging frequent-flier miles to win friends in the region. One cause for concern among many analysts is the weekly flight between Caracas and Tehran (with a stop in Damascus) that Iran Air has flown for two years."

He quotes Frida Ghitis: "Flight manifests are kept secret, so neither cargo nor passenger information is well known ...one Israeli report suggested that Venezuela and Bolivia are supplying uranium to Iran."

Two questions emerge. One, is it required of Caracas and Tehran to provide a detailed report of the cargo and passengers to the US and Israel, and perhaps also cc-ed to a list of their friends and allies?

The second pertains to Israel itself. Why is the media most concerned by Iran's 'suspicious' behavior in Latin America, despite the fact that its presence is welcomed by various countries in the hemisphere, while Israel - whose bloody involvement has wrought much chaos to South America - is simply unquestioned, and even cited as a credible source? There is no evidence to link Iran to death squads, or any Iranian firm with "an archive and computer file on journalists, students, leaders, leftists, politicians and so on" to be hunted

down, killed or simply made to 'disappear' under brutal regimes. Israel's own history in Latin America seems to inspire little commentary by the ever-vigilant 'many analysts'. McLeary, Ghitis and others need to do their homework before leveling accusations against others. The book *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship* may be a good place to start.

Back to the lurking Ayatollahs in America's backyard, Susan Kaufman Purcell is also raising questions, this time about Brazil. In Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva welcomed his Iranian counterpart, president Ahmadinejad late November 2009. In the January 7 Wall Street Journal, Purcell claimed: "Until recently, the Obama administration assumed that Brazil and the United States were natural allies who shared many foreign policy interests, particularly in Latin America. Brazil, after all, is a friendly democracy with a growing market economy and Western cultural values." Purcell suggests that Brazil's various achievements - largely beneficial to the US - qualified the country to become "more like us".

The article infers, however, that Brazil is actually "not like us". The fact that it dares to be different - by pursuing a Brazilian-centered foreign policy - shows the audacity of the deceptively loveable Lula. The Brazilian president is apparently going rouge simply by deviating from Washington's regional and international priorities. Amongst his many crimes: "Instead of expressing concern over Iran's activities in Latin America, Brazil is drawing closer to Tehran and hopes to expand its \$2 billion bilateral trade to \$10 billion in the near future."

Another: "He reiterated his support for Iran's right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful uses, while insisting that there is no evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons." And of course, Purcell doesn't fail to remind us of "the weekly flights between Caracas and Tehran that bring passengers and cargo into Venezuela."

Western media is indeed rife with all sorts of unfounded accusations, baseless speculations and superfluous insinuations. They evoke in the reader and viewer a dread and fear, based in this case on the doomsday scenario whereby fanatical Latin Americans and radical Muslims gang up on America, and ultimately Israel.

Now consider these appalling insinuations by the Economist. First it claims that the Brazilian President "offered support for Iran's work on nuclear technology for (supposedly) peaceful use." Note the word "supposedly".

Then: One of the "instruments" of destabilizing Latin America is Iran's production of "news programmes and documentaries for Bolivian television, no doubt to give a fair and balanced view of the Great Satan." Note the writer's insertion of the little irrelevant term "Great Satan" to convert the act of TV production that challenges Western mainstream media's narrative into a menacing endeavor.

More: Brazil president talked "about Israel's right to stay just where it is on the map." Of course, Lula didn't phrase it that way. This is the writer's attempt to remind us of the claim that Iran has threatened to wipe Israel off the map.

Still, more: "...protesters waved banners reminding Mr Ahmadinejad that the Holocaust had indeed taken place". This provides the big climax - the claim that Iran's president has denied the Holocaust.

But why the charged, exaggerated commentary?

A seemingly random Economist 'advertisement' box embedded with the article, and another long side column at the magazine's website reminds readers of "The Economist Debate Series - January 11-18." The topic of the week, presented with an image of a warplane radar zooming in on the Iranian map, asks the question: "Is It Time to Strike Iran?"

After reading such unsubstantiated, yet disquieting analyses, how would most readers respond?

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