

Mideast Terrorists Exporting Violence to U.S.

Role of South American nations indicates active participation

BY DIANA HULL, PH.D.

The connection between South American nations and Mideast terrorist groups has now been confirmed by a large number of undeniably reliable sources. But the tepid response from the U.S. government and Western Europe means we have all forgotten what we needed to remember from the study of ancient history.

Although Korans and prayer shawls have often been found near the U.S.-Mexican border, these frightening clues about what this portends have been largely ignored, and we are in the midst of repeating the sad epic tale authored by Homer in 850 B.C. The wiser heads of that far-off time wanted, it is said, to either burn the Trojan horse or break it open to see its contents. But modern leaders keep acting like Priam, who allegedly removed the lintel of the Scaean Gate and allowed the wooden horse to enter the city. The ancient tragedy that followed may not be completely factual, but the message is indelible, and our part of the world that remains free seems to neither remember nor understand its lessons.

What first concentrated my attention on this subject was a report last August 18th by WTOP.com, a Washington, D.C. radio station that delivers traffic updates, weather conditions, and news and proved to be “right on” when their reporter J.J. Green wrote that Iran had a secret pipeline into the U.S. via the bimonthly flight of Iran Air 744. “This 16-hour flight originated in Tehran,” J.J. Green said, “stops first in Beirut and then at Damascus International Airport for a 90-minute layover before continuing to Venezuela’s Caracas Maiquetía International Airport.”

This regular air service to South America from the Middle East evidently began in February of 2007, according to the WTOP.com reporter, and “was an early warning that the Venezuelan military was part of a plan to move Iranian agents inside the U.S. This Iran Air

flight is met by special Venezuelan forces, and “those on board are then sequestered from other arrivals.”

The Heritage Foundation’s Peter Brookes believes the passengers on this flight “may not even need visas” because they are “special and not identifiable” and because there is no transparency about who is entering and leaving Venezuela on these flights and no information about what category of special agents are on board, where they come from, and the purpose of their mission.

However, in August 2010 a Southern US District Court of New York’s indictment exposed the connection between Hezbollah, the proxy army of Iran, and the drug cartels responsible for the violence that plagues the U.S. border with Mexico. This information was also contained in a September 1, 2010 article in the *Washington Times* by Rep. Sue Myrick (R-AZ), which exposed the presence of Hezbollah in Mexico and their cache of weapons, whose actual size is unknown. Even last year there was evidence in Mexico, according to the Congresswoman, of the highly sophisticated tunnels, similar to the tunnels dug by Hezbollah into Israel. A few weeks after Congresswoman Myrick complained about this situation to Homeland Security’s Chief Janet Napolitano, Jameel Nasar, a Mexican national with ties to Hezbollah in Lebanon and tasked with carrying out operations against Israel and western targets, was arrested by the Mexican government. That was followed by the explosion of a car bomb just across the U.S. border in Juarez. The WTOP.com article also raised the possibility that agents that come to Venezuela from the Middle East would be able to find their way to the United States, not only by the usual routes, but via “submersibles” in the same way drugs come to the U.S. from parts of the Caribbean.

But was Iranian Air only bringing the newest crop of illegal and exceedingly dangerous OTM’s (Other Than Mexicans) to Venezuela from Iran, Lebanon, and Syria as the first stop in their northward trek to Mexico, and then the U.S.? Yes, there is evidence that this kind of movement is happening, but there is much more to the story than that. This Venezuelan operation, the

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WTOP.com article suggested, receives direction from the highest levels of the Iranian government, and there could be multiple purposes for this bi-monthly flight of Iran Air 744. So what could these travelers from Iran, Syria, and Lebanon be up to in addition to disguising themselves as Venezuelan citizens, travelers, or immigrants? And yes, entry into the U.S. could be easy for them, no need to wade a river or climb any fence, just arrive at U.S. Customs speaking Spanish and having a Venezuelan passport.

But other and even more sinister motives were suggested in the *Washington Times* article of April 21, 2010 by Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East specialist with the Congressional Research Service. He explained why he thinks these passengers on Flight 744 include “Qods,” shock troops who support the Taliban. And Katzman said that because Qod force operatives report directly to Iran’s Ali Khamenei, this information is very significant.

Peter Brookes, senior fellow for National Security Affairs at the Heritage Foundation, a former CIA employee and Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs, also agree that something even more secretive is going on that the sponsors of Flight 744 don’t want the international community to know about, especially exactly *who* is on these flights. That is why speculation about the meaning and purposes of this Tehran to Caracas via Beirut and Lebanon activity is so far reaching.

For example, according to J.J. Green, “Current and former U.S. intelligence officials also suspect that Flight 744 is moving people and weapons to Latin America for a possible attack on the U.S. if nuclear sites in Iran are struck by the U.S. or Israel.” Green cites the conclusions of Offer Baruch, a former Israeli Shin Bet agent and now Vice President of operations for International Shield, a security firm in Texas, who said that seats on Iran Air Flight 744 are “reserved for Iranian agents, including Hezbollah, the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and other intelligence personnel.” And if a member of the public tried to travel on this flight, “and it doesn’t matter whether it’s a week, a month, or six months in advance, they’d never get a seat on this plane where none of the passengers are processed on arrival, or subject to usual Venezuelan airport entry procedures.”

Baruch believes that “since the U.S. government has enacted strong sanctions against Iran, in part because of its nuclear program, there are worries the flight might provide an opportunity to skirt the embargo against materials that might be used for that program.” He also suggests that this special Iranian flight could be transporting uranium to Tehran on its return trip.

Former CIA Director Michael J. Hayden agrees with this statement about the Hezbollah connection, given the stopover of Flight 744 in Lebanon, which supports this conclusion. Hayden said “Clearly, Iran has been a sponsor of Hezbollah and clearly Hezbollah profits from this connection.” One way of looking at this relationship, Hayden said, is that the Iranian state might rely on Hezbollah as a strategic weapon for global reach, and says that the CIA has been aware of these flight activities for several years.

“Fundamentally, the thing that first, and very solidly, caught our attention at the Agency (CIA),” Hayden said, “was the inauguration of direct air flight between the two capitols, a conduit that people could travel from Iran into the Western Hemisphere, into Latin America in a way that would be very difficult for American intelligence services to detect and to understand,” and that “just the direct flight is something that we would be and should be concerned about.”

Mark Silverberg, of the Ariel Center for Global Reach (Israel), wrote in the Hudson Institute Journal last August that Hezbollah dictates Iranian decrees to the Lebanese government and it is difficult to determine the extent of their influence and control over Lebanese institutions, especially the army.

In the Pentagon’s first report to Congress on Tehran’s military, a U.S. official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told WTOP.com that “yes, there are concerns about the relationships between Iran and Venezuela, but you have to keep it in perspective.” But what does that mean?

The recommendations contained in the 9/11 Commission Report that key federal agencies with overlapping missions, concerns, and agendas must communicate with and coordinate their information and activities with each other takes on enhanced meaning at this time. And the absence of this coordination evidently continues today.

Is it actually possible that if we lose the fight for a safer border, that inaction could provoke a civil revolt against government complaisance and inertia? Is the occurrence of even more massive destruction, bloodshed, and tragedy the only thing that will wake up the President and his Homeland Security Chief?

Iranian agents are likely to be the most dangerous variety of illegal entrants one can imagine. They are even now blending in with an already massive invasion at our southern border, where the ratio of illegals who make it into the U.S. dwarfs the number who get caught. And it matters little whether the huge numbers of entrants has been reported as temporarily down. It is not

only the number of possible culprits that counts, it is the depth of their animosity, their deranged brutality, and their training in atrocity that makes immediately focused federal attention to counter this threat the government's most urgent responsibility. The final words of the 911 Commission's Thomas Kean were, "We're in danger of letting things slide. Time is not on our side."

Despite that caution a decade ago, we now hear on May 17th from the German Daily, *Die Welt*, "that Iran is building rocket bases in Venezuela. And that they are paying cash to build mid-range missile launch pads on the Paraguana Peninsula. Iranian engineers from a construction firm, Khatam al-Anbia, are owned by the Revolutionary Guard." *Die Welt* stated, "we visited this site in February of this year and found out that twenty meter deep rocket silos are planned and they assume that the huge cost of this project comes from Iranian oil revenues." The German Press Agency writes about things we rarely hear about in American media, revealing "that Germany will not now contest the placement of the Hamburg based Iranian Trade Bank on the EU sanctions list." This was a change from last year when they had refused to shut this Iranian bank down because Germany was Iran's number one EU trade partner.

Similar information about the Middle East-Latin American connection is found in recent articles by Vanessa Neumann, a native Venezuelan and Editor-at-Large of *Diplomat*, a London-based magazine. Neumann says Iran is reportedly helping Venezuela find and refine its estimated 50,000 tons of uranium reserves and that Venezuela provides Hezbollah operatives with Venezuelan national identity cards.

Neumann's article confirms that "harboring middle east terrorists is not new in Latin America and in 2005, six million Muslims were estimated to live there." Hezbollah is active in the so-called tri-border area," which is "home to a large, active Arab and Muslim community." The region includes parts of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil and is a "breeding ground for terrorist groups."

The most frightening realization, Neumann points out, "is the interconnectedness of Latin American governments and middle east terrorist groups."

So when Janet Napolitano, the leader of the Homeland Security agency, tells us the border is more secure than ever, so no need to worry, and the President asks with a twinkle whether we are recommending alligators in the river that separates us from Mexico, we have to wonder what strange alternative universe those supposedly protecting our country live in. Hezbollah fanatics are not only in the far reaches of Afghanistan, they live among us now, and many more are right at our door. So when will those charged with keeping us safe acknowledge the frightening truth, and what will they do about it and when?

The Trojan Horse problem, historian Barbara Tuchman concluded, exemplifies policy pursued contrary to self-interest and in the face of urgent warnings and feasible alternatives. "This occurs in even the earliest chronicle of western man and it suggests," she writes, "that such pursuits are an old and inherent human habit." No wonder Tuchman's book is titled *The March of Folly*.

How we and the rest of the relatively civilized world handles this impending disaster will be the test of how far we have come, if at all, and whether we understand how once great countries and cultures, like people, have lifespans, and like humans can disappear into dust. ■

End Notes

1. Appreciation is due to the outstanding collection of information from J.J. Green of the Washington, D.C. radio station WTOP.com.
2. Thanks to the always helpful Mike Cutler for emailing me two articles in the midst of my reporting on my earlier piece on this subject.
3. Quotes from Barbara W. Tuchman are from *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.