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The Americas Report is a continuation of the work of Dr. Constantine C. Menges' original America's Report. For almost two years that report chronicled the efforts of the Castro-Chavez axis and their allies in their efforts to undermine free nations and people throughout the Western Hemisphere. These efforts were in keeping with the theme of the July 1993 meeting of the Forum of São Paulo, which was founded in 1990 by Lula da Silva and Fidel Castro, "Our losses in Eastern Europe will be offset by our victories in Latin America."

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For any questions, comments, or those interested in receiving this report in the future or seeking to have their email removed from our list please contact **Nicole M. Ferrand** at our **new e-mail address: mengesproject@centerforsecuritypolicy.org**. If you have news stories that you think might be useful for future editions of this report please send them, with a link to the original website, to the same e-mail address. If you wish to contribute with an article, please send it to the same address, with your name and place of work or study.

THE RADICAL GRASSROOTS IN LATIN AMERICA PART II – Hezbollah Argentina.

By Luis Fleischman and Nicole M. Ferrand*

In our article "The Radical Grassroots" published on March 28, 2007, we discussed the potential situation generated by the emergence of new available masses represented in new populist movements in Latin America, formed by people who have been rather marginal in the political arena in the past. We also discussed the penetration of Islamists and Iran in the area as well as the role of Hugo Chávez as a catalyst and promoter of alliances between these groups and radical Islam.

In this piece, we will try to explore the current situation in Argentina. The Israeli analyst Ely Karmon studies the presence of Islamic groups in Argentina.¹ Karmon points out that Hezbollah Argentina is differing from its Venezuelan counterpart as it is not based on the Indian community but it includes radical rightists and populist elements both of which have close relations with local Arab Shiia's and the Iranian regime.²

Hezbollah Argentina works with the Islamic Association of Argentina (AIA) that has links to Hezbollah and to the government of Iran. Its website <http://www.asociacionislamica.org.ar/> celebrates the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, condemns the United Nations Security Council resolution that calls for sanctions against that country, and contains the most vicious attacks against Israel and the West.³

¹ Ely Karmon, "Hezbollah Latin America: Strange Group or Real Threat", Institute for Counterterrorism, 11/14/2006

² Ely Karmon, "Hezbollah Latin America: Strange Group or Real Threat", Institute for Counterterrorism, 11/14/2006

³ Ely Karmon, "Hezbollah Latin America: Strange Group or Real Threat", Institute for Counterterrorism, 11/14/2006

The AIA consists mainly of Shiiah converts to Islam who cooperate closely with the Iranian Embassy. The AIA, according to Karmon, cooperates and works with the Argentinian piquetero (picketeer) violent group known as “Quebracho”.



Protest of “Quebracho” in Córdoba, Argentina. Protesters from the Arab community and from Islamic groups, with posters of the Ayatollah and of Hezbollah. Source: La Nación, Argentina.

The group has direct links with Hugo Chávez and by the same token it communicates with the Embassy of Iran via a direct line.⁴ In every protest they express their support for Iran and their repudiation of Israel.⁵ “Quebracho” is described by Karmon as being a small group. However, we have reasons to believe that its importance may be stronger than its size.

“Quebracho” whose official name is the Patriotic Revolutionary Movement (MPR) was created in August 1996 emanating from an alliance of activists in a number of loose popular organizations and other pre-existent organizations of the left including Peronists, Socialists, Communists and some former revolutionary movements that were active in the 1970’s. Their ideology (see <http://www.quebracho.org.ar/>) is based on anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. “Quebracho” targets concrete enemies: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United States, Japan, Israel and those Argentinean businesses and families that are linked to this international power.⁶

The group believes in violence as a means to achieve the ends and advocates an understanding of self-defense which does not match any international legal standards: “Violence in the hands of the people is not violence but it is justice and self-defense”. They are convinced that violence should be generalized because it is more effective than any other form of struggle, particularly in comparison to the act of voting. They claim that “you do not need to convince the enemies, you must defeat them”. Because of the collapse of De La Rúa in 2001, “Quebracho” believes that by deepening the concept of rebellion, it will achieve victory.⁷ Indeed the movement continuously organizes protests against the government in

⁴ <http://organizacionislam.org.ar/index.htm>

⁵ Daniel Gallo “Controvertida Agenda Política del Embajador de Venezuela”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 11/16/2006

⁶ www.quebracho.org.ar

⁷ **Fernando de la Rúa** Bruno (born September 15, 1937) was president of Argentina from December 10, 1999 to December 21, 2001 for the Alliance for Work, Justice and Education (a political alliance of the Radical Civic Union and Frepaso). He was finally forced out of office by the popular demonstrations carried out by Piquetero Movements and people in general in the midst of the December 2001 riots, the financial crisis, and growing popular unrest.

any occasion and anywhere in the country. They have confronted the police numerous times and their members have often been arrested.

“Quebracho” reaches out to and works with the popular classes, the unemployed, students, the youth and others and “even though they may pursue partial goals, they potentially could contribute to the revolution.” The group advocates refusing the payment of foreign debt, foreign investments and support the re-nationalization of companies that were privatized during the 1990’s. They also believe that the state must be in charge of the economic life of society.

“Quebracho” explicitly rejects the government of President Néstor Kirchner which they accuse of trying to restore the decaying old oligarchy. However, they fully embrace Hugo Chávez. “Quebracho” is closely linked with the regional Chávez-sponsored Continental Bolivarian Stream and is a founding member of the Argentinean chapter of the Bolivarian Circles. Ideologically, the group shares all aforementioned views with Chávez and the Bolivarians, including the idea that “the different nations of Latin America are the result of an imperialist arrangement of what originally was one nation for which heroes such as Simón Bolívar, and others fought”.⁸ This idea is perhaps the most significant to understand the role played by Hugo Chávez.

Despite the group’s well written pamphlets, their content is simple and easy to communicate to the general population. In some cases their discourse reflects what they preach, namely violence. “Quebracho” defines and denigrates their enemies at length, and talks about radical change, expressing very clearly what is they want to destroy but offers little constructive approach. For them, violence plays a role in so far, as it gives the perpetrators and those surrounding them a sense that victory is right around the corner. In the mind of groups like “Quebracho” the utopia that guides their violence is the simple anti-western socialism but violence makes the reality of this change imminent. This type of violence and this type of groups are supported by Chávez in Venezuela and abroad.

This is why “Quebracho” and other similar groups establish a special direct relationship with Hugo Chávez. At the same time the connection between these groups and radical Islam is important because radical Islam has provided unprecedented “effective” violence. Iran, Hezbollah and their spectacular murderous attacks provide a fascinating model, not only in so far as they are capable of shocking and demoralizing the enemy, but also because of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the cause.⁹ This is the spirit of the Chávez-sponsored alliances. What would be Chávez’s ultimate purpose?

⁸ www.quebracho.org.ar

⁹ This idea has been articulated by Jorge Verstryngge, the author of a book titled “La Guerra Periferica y el Islam Revolucionario: Origenes, Reglas y Etica de la Guerra Asimetrica.” (The Peripheric War and Revolutionary Islam: Origins, Rules and Ethics of Radical Islam” .The book, praises Islamic terrorism as “the ultimate and preferred method of asymmetric warfare because it involves fighters willing to sacrifice their lives to kill the enemy”. According to Joe Sweeny, the Chávez government financed a special edition of Verstryngge’s book exclusively for the Army of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Verstryngge spoke in Army-sponsored conferences and has become a Guru in the Chávez –controlled Venezuelan army. See Joe Sweeny, “Jorge Verstryngge: The Guru of Bolivarian Asymmetric Warfare” in <http://www.vcrisis.com/index.php?content=letters/200509091152>

The Venezuelan President dictator spends a large part of his time outside Venezuela, not attending his domestic affairs so much but expanding his alliances with political and grassroots leaders. At the same time Chávez automatically introduces his new partners to Iran. Hugo Chávez's Bolivarianism is not mere populism or socialism. It literally means to unify Latin America under a single government. A position Chávez considers himself to be the natural candidate. We reasonable assume that he believes that such Latin American unity may take place in his lifetime under his leadership. He unfortunately finds reinforcement by those Latin American leaders who visit Caracas as the new Mecca of a new socialist era and display a genuflecting attitude towards Chávez. Chávez often behaves in ways as if he were the President and leader of all of these countries. A clear example is the decision by the Morales' Bolivian government to nationalize the oil and natural gas industries immediately after spending a whole weekend with Chávez. Chávez assumed a similar attitude when he pushed the recently elected Ecuadorian President into a confrontation with Colombia over border anti-coca fumigations.

Aid is what is giving the Venezuelan diplomacy to tour and preach in neighborhoods and towns where the inhabitants have basic needs. Scholarships, health plans, and commercial exchanges for small businesses are some of the offers of the Chávez regime that are opening doors so that lectures to promote the 'Bolivarian Revolution' can take place. The former Venezuelan Ambassador to Argentina, **Roger Capella**, (the one that urged D'Elía to show open support for the Iranians and risk his job), gave a speech in September 2006, to an auditorium in Tandil, Argentina where he stated: "The Venezuelan Diplomacy is transforming itself from its traditional form to an active militancy." His trips to Venezuela at the time were very frequent. He invited people from several countries will all their expenses covered took with him huge amounts of 'souvenirs' such as bags with Chavez's face printed on them for the people that would attend. One Argentinian picketer close to Capella said that 'Chavism welcomes all people.' Venezuela even offers Argentinian students six months of full scholarship for people who adhere to his 'Revolution.'¹⁰ Capella, personally supervised welfare programs paid for by Venezuela in poor neighborhoods. The Venezuelan government is fulfilling responsibilities which fall exclusively under the realm of the Argentinean state. Will residents of these recipient neighborhoods be loyal to the Argentinean government or to the new savior Hugo Chávez? At the end of the day it is Chávez who delivers the goods while the successive Argentinean governments have turned their backs on them. The answer is given by Ambassador Capella himself, stating that "the Venezuelan diplomacy is transforming itself from being a traditional diplomacy into an active militancy".¹ This militancy also includes Iranian elements. Ambassador Capella has been also giving lectures throughout Colleges and Universities in Argentina together with the Iranian business envoy, Moshen Baharvand.¹¹

Other Piquetero groups such as 'Barrio de Pie', whose leader Jorge Ceballos is a current member of the Kirchner government, and, Luis D'Elía's 'Movement for Housing and Land' (D'Elía was, until recently, part of the Kirchner government), have very close relations with the Venezuelan President. D'Elía also has connections to Iran via Chávez. Kirchner allowed Ceballos and D'Elía to organize Chávez's anti-Bush demonstration at the Ferrocarril Oeste ('Ferro' as it is popular known) soccer stadium in Buenos Aires early in

¹⁰ Controvertida agenda política del embajador de Venezuela. November 16, 2006. Venezuela Real. By Daniel Gallo.

¹¹ Daniel Gallo, *La Nación*, ibid

March 2007. Ceballos is a key member of the People's Bolivarian Congress (CBP), an organization founded by Hugo Chávez which gathers various grassroots organizations from all over Latin America (including "Quebracho") such as indigenous, peasants, workers, unemployed, women and youth" that, according to Chávez, "constitute the main ingredient of Latin American unity"¹² ii. It seems that Ceballos' loyalty to Chávez could well compete with his loyalty to Kirchner. In the words of a Piquetero close to Ambassador Capella, "Chavism welcomes all people."¹³

Luis D'Elía, the former Argentinian Social Land and Housing Under-Secretary, was asked to resign at the request of President Néstor Kirchner for his support of Iran over this country's alleged involvement in the terrorist attack on the Jewish community center, AMIA, in 1994. D'Elía's public support for Iran had been determined days before while having lunch with Ambassador Capella. After D'Elía communicated to Kirchner his intention to support Iran, the President requested that D'Elía abstain from doing that. However, the picketer did not comply. At the end of the day Chávez carried more weight than Kirchner himself. In other words, it looks that the ground is being prepared in case Chávez wants to turn against any government including the Argentinian because his alliances with local groups, could provide a basis of subversion and conspiracy just at the heart of Argentina itself.

We are not suggesting that Chávez will take Argentina or any other country overnight. But any government in Latin America, particularly those who have developed close relations with Hugo Chávez, need to take this possible scenario with utmost seriousness. The fact that Kirchner provided this stage to Chávez de-legitimized the Argentinian government while, at the same time, enhanced Chávez as a supra-national leader. In other words, this is not just a case of "dual loyalty" by Argentinians. The event at 'Ferro' is almost an actual image of "dual power" where Chávez intentionally played the role of a parallel leader. In a country such as Argentina where charismatic leaders tend to prevail over institutions, the power of this image is even stronger.

Mr. Kirchner's vision is myopic and his way of thinking represents the typical shortsightedness of his own Peronist background. The populist welfare state seduces Kirchner and his followers as Delilah's beauty seduced Samson. Kirchner's pro-Chávez attitude and policy is therefore, dangerous to the region and beyond. We will continue to explore further how these dynamics play out in other countries and try to assess the possible scenarios that these may lead to.

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