

Considerations on the first (frustrated) action of 'Hezbollah in Venezuela'

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On the 23rd of October the Venezuelan police discovered two explosive devices nearby the United States embassy in Caracas. The alarm necessitated the evacuation of a school situated a small distance away and two controlled explosions were carried out a few hours later.

On the same day the police detained the suspected culprit, José Miguel Rojas, a 26 years old student of Bolivariana University. When arrested, he was carrying a rucksack containing black gunpowder (similar to that used in the fabrication of fireworks), electric material for the detonation, folders with the name of Hezbollah and various religious books.

Apparently the second device, placed near the American embassy, had in fact been intended for the Israeli embassy, but José Miguel had lost his nerve and abandoned the second packet nearby of the first embassy. According to the arrested man's testimony, he had used instructions received on the internet to make the explosives.

It is clear that we are talking about the **actions of an amateur**. In addition, he had already aroused the suspicion of the taxi driver who had driven him to the scene of the explosions and who later helped identifying him for the police.

However, this incident still deserves special attention because it **signifies the first (frustrated) action of 'Hezbollah in Latin America'/'Hezbollah in Venezuela'**, a group analyzed only some weeks ago by Manuel R. Torres in JihadMonitor.org¹.

The intentions of Hezbollah in Latin America had been actually already mentioned in that *Athena Paper*. In an announcement published on its website on the 18th of August the group declared its purpose very clearly (generally their texts are full of spelling mistakes):

“Hezbollah Latino America is thinking of placing explosives against a U.S.A allied organization in Latin America. The reason would be the launching of Hezbollah Latino America as an international movement”²

Seen in this light, the events of the 23rd of October represent the materialisation and advancement of these plans, as the group had declared five days before the unsuccessful attack its intention to start jihad in Latin America in 2007.

“The war starts with the presentation of Hezbollah America Latina, a purpose entrusted to two Mujahedin latinos, who received orders from Hezbollah America Latina and from the Sheidy Teodoro Darnott to place two explosive devices in a city of Latin America which we will perfectly identify by the hour, address, date and other details with an announcement through our web pages in Internet, these low power explosive devices have only for aim the drawing of public attention and launching of our propaganda, as a presentation, but marks the beginning of a war against imperialism and world Zionism from Latin America...”³

¹ Manuel R. Torres. “[La fascinación por el éxito: el caso de Hezbollah en América Latina](#)”, *Jihad Monitor Occasional Paper* No 1, 17 octubre de 2006.

² <http://colocaciondeexplosivo.blogspot.com/>

³ <http://groups.msn.com/justiciadivinavenezuela/general.msnw>

On the other hand, on the 25th of October, two days after the unsuccessful attempt, **Hezbollah in Latin America assumed the authorship and announced new attacks using simultaneous explosions:**

“What is the purpose of home made explosive devices? The intention of these devices was the Hezbollah Venezuela movement’s presentation. We always fulfil what we promise. On the website where we announced the explosive devices’ setting we said that they were of low power, that they were not intended to harm nor the people or the property, that they only pursued drawing public attention and propaganda of Hezbollah (...) The presentation operation failed, therefore it has to be repeated but now considering the difficulties, in favour of a new presentation operation, Hezbollah Venezuela is studying the possibility of placing the same type of devices with the same propagandistic material but instead of doing it in only one location, doing it in various and in a simultaneous and controlled way so that everybody acts at the same time...”⁴

Since then, the Hezbollah Venezuela MSN group on the internet has spent its time collecting dozens of news (mainly in foreign media, including the CNN channel and Stratfor.com) that have picked up briefly the news of the explosives and the arrest in Caracas. This is exactly what the attack pretended to induce and therefore they **have only too well achieved the advertising effects wanted, even with the failing of the explosives.**

The analysis of what has happened up to now enables to formulate the following conclusions:

- a) Due to the clear interest of the group to fulfil their promises, it is possible to predict **new propagandistic actions –with explosives in the way– against American and Israeli targets** in Venezuela.
- b) For the moment, **it is not expected** that these types of actions will provoke, **either human or material considerable damages**. The group’s actions are publicly very clear and, were it to over step the mark it could be dismantled without major effort on the part of the Venezuelan security forces. As already mentioned in the JM Occasional Paper, the group’s different websites don’t do anything to hide the names and photographs of its principal members and leaders. This naivety/desire of publicity is not new, as –for example– the leader of the group, Teodoro Rafael Darnott, offered all kind of personal details in a message in March 2004, including his birth place and the number of his national identity document: C.I.V 5.558.381⁵.
- c) In fact, the choice of Hezbollah for the name of the group and its apparent jihadist character, answers to a simple desire of renown in a country where the **anti-American and anti-Israeli speech possesses a wide welcome in both the society and the official levels**. In addition to the numerous jokes and insults of the president Hugo Chavez to the president George W. Bush, Chavez was one of the non-Muslim leaders who most strongly criticized Israel during the recent war in

⁴ <http://groups.msn.com/justiciadivinavenezuela/general.msnw>

⁵ http://mx.msusers.com/VENEZUELAPARAELMUNDO/general.msnw?action=get_message&myview=1&ID_Message=377

Lebanon, accusing the Jewish government to carry out “genocide” against the Lebanese people. As a consequence of this Hezbollah in Venezuela knows from previous experience that the main elements of its propaganda have social support in their favour and, importantly, that this accounts for the high level of tolerance on the part of the state’s security forces. A presumption confirmed during the following days, with no judicial action taken against the group’s responsible.

- d) But even in spite of Hezbollah’s apparent inoffensive character in Venezuela, **its existence does results problematic**. On one hand, the group could cause serious unwanted damages with its violent attacks or, worse even, **could experiment a much more aggressive position when not drawing the media’s attention** that had initially aroused. On the other hand, –and this is probably more worrying–, with its passiveness against this type of violent propaganda, **Hugo Chavez’s regime is sending the following message to other “real” Jihadist groups** (to the authentic Hezbollah or groups belonging to the Global Jihadist Movement): **that its propaganda, recruitment and fundraising activities are tolerated in Venezuela.**

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References:

- References must be at the end of the text.

Style:

Article:

Gregory, Shaun, “France and the War on Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.15, No.1 (Spring 2003), pp.124–147

Book:

Bergen, Peter L., *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, (New York: Free Press, 2006)

Book Chapter:

Hafez, Mohammed M. "From Marginalization to Massacres. A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria", Wiktorowicz, Quintan (ed.) *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 37-60