

The New Role of Latin America in Iran's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

The present article intends to explore discernible shift in Iran's foreign policy toward Latin American countries in recent years. Iran's relations with Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and more recently, Brazil, have grown warmer in recent years. The ever-increasing scale and scope of diplomatic ties and bilateral economic cooperation agreements between Iran and these Latin American states, most of whom pursue generally radical, anti-US policies, demonstrate the changing orientation in the Iranian policy as well as in the dynamics of the Latin American politics. The emergence of an Iranian president in 2005 with a populist outlook and pronounced anti-US/Anti-Western rhetoric has facilitated the closer ties between Iran and the leftist Latin American governments. This aspect of the Iranian policy has drawn both domestic criticism and outside opposition, particularly from the United States. Given this, a major question that could be raised is whether the new trend will be a long term feature of Iranian foreign policy or a temporary, transient one, especially taking into account the major role played by the personality of these countries' leaders in their policymaking. A related question is whether these heads of states will be able to create the necessary institutions, processes, and coordination mechanisms to remain in place even after they leave office. The author looks at the recent developments in these politico-economic relations, and tries to examine the degree of long-term resilience of Tehran's current involvement in Latin America. The main conclusion of the paper is that for as long as the Islamic Republic of Iran feels the need to look for countervailing force in its ongoing conflict with the US and the West, the current policies in seeking close political and economic ties with the anti-Western and radical Latin American states, as part of a larger coalition of like-minded developing countries, will continue.

Keywords: Iran's Foreign Policy, Latin America, Nuclear Program, Anti-Americanism, National Interest

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of political and economic relations between Iran under President Ahmadinejad and a number of leftist/socialist Latin American governments with clear populist tendencies has received considerable attention, both in Iran and elsewhere. The domestic Iranian interest in these rapidly-expanding relations is directly related to the discussion at the national level on the formulation and execution of Iran's foreign policy in general, and the serious political implications involved in strengthening this long-distance link with the Central and South American states in particular. The US government's attention to, and its interest in this intriguing liaison can be analyzed within the framework of the on-going conflict between Tehran and Washington at one level, and at another level from the angle of the US seemingly hyper-sensitivity to Iran's growing presence in an area traditionally viewed as a US exclusive backyard. The emergence of the leftist-oriented and more radical governments in the Western Hemisphere since the 1998 Chavez victory in Venezuela, given his controversial relations with the anti-US Cuban leaders, seems to have made Iran's Latin American connection all the more troubling for Washington.

The recent noticeable expansion in the relations between Iran and the revolutionary/leftist Latin American states should, however, be viewed within the broader context of Iran's foreign relations going back to the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Looking back, it was hardly surprising to see the Iranian revolutionaries sharing camaraderie and close fraternal sentiments with the anti-US Cubans in 1979, and later with the victorious Sandinistas in Nicaragua.⁽¹⁾ The Non-aligned Movement's Summit in Havana in September 1979, the first ever NAM meeting for Iran to attend as a member in the aftermath of the demise of the pro-West Iranian monarchy served to establish the bond between the two countries and



in a larger sense, between Iran and the socialist, leftist, and generally anti-US members of the Movement.⁽²⁾ The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, the imposition of economic sanctions by the US in the wake of the hostage crisis and the subsequent rupture of diplomatic relations, and the growing political isolation of Iran during the 1980s due to the War and its negative ramifications were the key factors leading to the increased importance of expanding relations with the accommodating Latin American governments. The conspicuous relations with the “radicals” mellowed gradually as of late 1980s-early 1990s due to the changing state of affairs, both in Iran and in Latin America. The changes in the foreign policy attitudes of the regional states, in part could be explained by the collapse the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. By the early 1990s, in addition to Cuba and Nicaragua, Iran had opened embassies in Chile, Columbia, and Uruguay – whose governments could hardly be labeled as “radical” or “Anti-American”. In fact, such an expansion of relations was part of the general thrust of the Iranian foreign policy to counter the impact of the US-imposed economic sanctions, and search for alternative sources of supply for essential goods. Thereby, as part of Iran’s trade diversification scheme, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay became major sources for Iranian imports from the region.⁽³⁾ After President Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, the Iranian government tried to strengthen ties to these states and other Third World nations not allied to the United States.

With this in mind, a primary objective of the present article is to find answers to the following three questions: 1- What is the basis of Iran’s post-revolution intense diplomacy for strengthening its bilateral ties with the radical/left-leaning states in Latin America? 2- What is the extent of Iranian trade and investment involvement in this region? and 3- Will these relations persevere in the long-term or instead prove to be transient and short-lived? In so far as the rationale for Iran’s post-2005 rapid expansion of relations with Latin America is concerned, three critical issues might explain the new drive to establish closer ties with the “non-hostile” and “non-aligned” Latin American states: one, the post-revolutionary tradition of anti-imperialist outlook and orientation in world affairs necessitating search for like-minded allies; two, the political imperative of search for and enlisting the support of other states for Iran’s embattled nuclear program; and three, the long-standing pragmatism of sheer economic interests, especially for



an oil-export- dependent economy.

Yet, Iran's new Latin American policy has not been without its domestic critics. For instance, some political analysts have voiced concerns about the undue horizontal increase in the activities of the Iranian foreign ministry, which they argue has expanded into too many different regions, established relations with countries of minimal importance for and impact on the country's core foreign policy issues, and has simply spread itself too thin. As argued by the critics, Iran is not a superpower to be compelled or able to establish and maintain diplomatic ties with so many countries in different regions of the world.⁽⁴⁾ They further argue that much-expanded Iran-Latin American relations are not based on Iran's national interest, and do not serve its grand strategies. In contrast, the advocates of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy orientation have supported his expanding and fairly controversial ties with the Latin American states from the viewpoint of forging bonds with like-minded "progressive/revolutionary" states, the general anti-imperialist platform, the utility of making "inroads into the enemy's backyard," and also seeking urgently-needed support on such critical issues as the nuclear program.⁽⁵⁾ From the standpoint of the supporters of the current foreign policy, especially given the idealized image of the Islamic Republic as a "world power", the fostering of such overseas contacts extends Iran's global reach far beyond the traditional domains of influence in its immediate neighborhood in the Persian Gulf, Central and Southwest Asia, and the Greater Middle East.

Predictably, the recent expansion of relations between Iran and the leftist/populist Latin American states has generated strong opposition from the US, which can be best understood and analyzed within the larger framework of Tehran's ongoing hostility toward Washington since 1979. Iranian officials have accused the US government of the 19th century colonialism in its dealings with Iran and the other Middle Eastern states which oppose its "expansionist" and interventionist policies. The two rivals have consistently tried to curtail and contain each other's area of influence and operation. Iran has relentlessly expressed concerns over the US political and military presence and active engagement in the Greater Middle East, and more specifically, in the Persian Gulf area, which has reached a new peak since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The concerns over a US military attack, its subversive activities as well as the use of its soft power have been



viewed as the most dangerous threats ever since the 1979. The Iranian moderate and radical politicians have been divided by foreign policy issues concerning the best way to handle the nuclear crisis, and Iran's relations with the West. However, they have been united by their security concerns for the presence of foreign troops in the region, and by their desire to avoid – and thwart - Iran's political isolation. This is why all post-revolution presidents have endorsed a multi-dimensional foreign policy which has required looking beyond Europe and the Middle East for allies as a way to confront the reality of being surrounded by the hostile or pro-American governments in the region. For its part, the US has viewed with deep suspicion Iran's active foreign policy, and has endeavored to vigorously oppose all Iranian engagements in its surrounding area.

Iran's Latin American Policy: Prior to and after 2005

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of Iran's close political relations with Latin American states, notably with Cuba and Nicaragua, dates back to the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The orientation and ideals of anti-imperialist foreign policy of the leftist/radical, and non-aligned regimes in Latin America had a strong appeal in the post-revolutionary Iran. Selling oil to the Sandinistas on extremely advantageous terms and frequent visits to Havana and Managua in the early 1980s by various groups from the Iranian Parliament (*Majlis*) and other governmental agencies reflected such an appeal.⁶ Establishment of a joint economic commission with Brazil – not a radical government like Cuba or Nicaragua - in the early 1980s did in fact represent a more pragmatic approach in Iranian foreign policy, reflecting recognition of Brazil's economic-industrial-technological potentials which could meet some of Iran's needs at the time. The end of the decade witnessed the termination of the Iran-Iraq War and the beginning of the post-War reconstruction period at the national level which also coincided with the end of the Cold War at the international level. The cumulative impact of the two simultaneous trends led to the emergence of less idealistic and more pragmatic foreign policy behaviors under President Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), when the cost of ideologically-driven policies appeared to exceed the benefits. The decision in the 1990s to open new embassies in a number of Latin American countries under governments of clearly non-radical orientation – even some with very close ties to Washington –



represented attempts to make changes to improve Iran's political and economic situation. The new approach, as underlined by Mahmood Vaezi, a former deputy foreign minister for American and European Affairs, was part of a multi-vector foreign policy which included establishment and expansion of ties with many countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. Notwithstanding the need to establish and maintain good relations with the non-aligned states as well as the countries with less-hostile and more accommodating foreign policy, Vaezi contends that Iranian policy makers chose to place more emphasis on expanding ties with Iran's neighbors, and Muslim countries in the Middle East and elsewhere.⁽⁷⁾

The trend of expanding relations with a wide range of countries under governments with quite differing political – and even ideological – persuasion were continued during Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency, even if the country's major foreign policy challenge – the antagonistic relations with the US – remained unresolved. The victory of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) who campaigned on a reform platform opened a new page in Iran's foreign policy. His reformist agenda proved instrumental in reducing the level of tension in Iran's relations with many Western countries. With the rise of the tension to new heights in early 1997 as a result of the occurrence of a number of incidents in Europe, the EU had prohibited bilateral meetings at the ministerial levels in its April 1997 statement. Soon after Khatami's election, the EU ambassadors who had left Tehran en masse a few months earlier returned to their posts in Tehran; and the foreign ministers of 15 EU member countries decided to lift the ban on ministerial level talks with Iran; and declared their willingness to begin a comprehensive (and non-critical) negotiation process with Iran. Iran's relations with the European Union gradually improved. Key European governments, including Italy, expressed their dissatisfaction with the U.S. sanctions against Iran. In February 1998, Lamberto Dini, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, explained that the purpose of his trip to Tehran was to strengthen bilateral relations with Iran. Khatami's visits to Italy and France served to further remove previous suspicions and pave the way for substantial improvement in bilateral and multilateral relations. Progressively, the volume of bilateral trade between Iran and the EU members and the monetary value of Iran's exports to these countries increased.⁽⁸⁾ Khatami's well-known idea and proposal of "Dialogue among Civilizations" – which was recognized and



supported by the UN General Assembly in 1998 – came to have a very positive ameliorating effect on the improvement of Iran’s international image. The outside world, inclusive of the EU – and even to some degree, the US under President Clinton – came to accord credence to Iran’s pronouncements that it did not seek conflict and political adventure.

The election of George W. Bush in November 2000 changed the situation dramatically and put an end to the prospects of possible easing of tension – and eventual rapprochement – between Washington and Tehran. Mohammad Khatami, who was regarded as a moderate leader by most European governments, felt betrayed by the US President who placed Iran in an “Axis of Evil” (alongside Iraq and North Korea) in late January 2002, and expected the Western allies to work together in order to punish Iran in the hope of changing its foreign policy behaviors. The US military action in Afghanistan and Iraq and stationing of tens of thousands of US combat forces in the territories flanking Iran could hardly serve to ease the increased tension between the two adversaries. The situation became further exacerbated in early 2003 when the growth of Iranian nuclear activities became a contentious issue, to be taken up by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and subsequently a matter for political negotiations with the EU. Khatami’s personal dispensation to dialogue and his administration’s reliance on tension-reducing approaches and policies managed to bring the rapidly worsening nuclear crisis situation under control through the signing of the Tehran Agreement of October 2003 with the EU-3 Foreign Ministers, requiring a temporary suspension of Iranian enrichment activities.⁽⁹⁾

The presidential elections in Iran in June 2005 led to the emergence of the then mayor of Tehran, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, with a conservative outlook. He had campaigned on a pro-poor, justice-seeking egalitarian platform on domestic issues and a highly rhetorical, confrontational foreign policy – a pronounced, major departure from the outlook and policy under Khatami. While Khatami believed in dialogue as the mechanism for resolving foreign policy disputes, including Iran’s nuclear program, Ahmadinejad came in with a totally different outlook and discourse. As will be discussed later, soon after taking office, he set aside the 2003 nuclear agreement and ordered the resumption of uranium enrichment, which led to the referral of Iran’s nuclear case to the UN Security Council. Ahmadinejad’s



approach to foreign policy has been based on a highly rhetorical discourse, with a pronounced confrontational mix of anti-imperialist/anti-Zionist slogans, reminiscent of the early days of the 1979 Revolution. His public questioning of the authenticity of the Holocaust – which created a stumbling block in the way of his government's dealing with the Western bloc - and the policy of promoting ties with the anti-US states and groups across the developing world, including in Latin America, proved to be the hallmarks of Iran's new foreign policy in the post-2005 period.

It is clear that the fundamental threats to the existence of the Islamic Republic – whether in the form of military attack or through subversion, and more recently, through what has been referred to in official discourse as the “soft power” - has remained practically unchanged in the minds of the country's leadership. In response to such concerns and/or threats, while Hashemi Rafsanjani and Khatami relied in principle on diplomacy and dialogue to confront the anti-Iran policies of the Western powers, Ahmadinejad has advocated a more confrontational approach to dealing with “the bullying and hegemonic policies of the U.S”. Ahmadinejad's turn to the radical/left-leaning states in Latin America should, therefore, be viewed and analyzed within this much broader context. Based on his deep suspicion of the Western intentions, he remarked in February 2007 on the nature of the “aggressive powers”: “If you pull back, they will push ahead, but if you stand against them, because of this resistance, they will back off.”⁽¹⁰⁾ As analyzed by a notable Iranian scholar, Ahmadinejad decided to get involved “aggressively in the United States' own backyard” rather than acting passively in Iran's backyard—the Middle East.⁽¹¹⁾ Viewed from the perspective of Ahmadinejad and his supporters, the victory of Chavez in Venezuela's 1998 elections, Daniel Ortega's return to power in Nicaragua in 2006, and the victory of Evo Morales in the Bolivian presidential elections (2006) are considered as the victory of the anti-imperialist front in Latin America.⁽¹²⁾ It is not surprising, therefore, to find Ahmadinejad's government quite at ease with the Latin American leaders such as Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales – as outspoken anti-US Latin American statesmen. Ahmadinejad sees himself as a fervent, principalist Muslim, and Chavez is a devout, practicing Catholic, yet their anti-US outlook, platform and rhetoric has brought them together. While Ahmadinejad looks for more like-minded Latin American revolutionaries to promote his anti-US



platform⁽¹³⁾, from the Cuban and the other leftist Latin American governments' points of view, the expansion of economic and political ties with the sympathetic countries outside the region indicates a more pragmatic objective: to offset – at least partially - the negative impact and repercussions of the loss of Soviet protection, both in terms of enlisting the political and moral support of new allies in their confrontation with the US as well as to make up for the lost economic benefits. This is not to imply that Iran, Syria or other like-minded states could in any comparable way fill the vacuum created by the downfall of their communist patron. It simply means that the birds of feather flock together, and political leaders with similar outlooks or agendas tend to associate with each other regardless of the geographic distance separating them.

Iran-Latin American Political Relations

The discussion thus far has shed some light on the background to the attention-grabbing relations between Iran and Latin American states, particularly the radical, left-leaning regimes in the area. It was argued that on the basis of a shared revolutionary, anti-imperialist outlook, the post-revolutionary Iran in the early 1980s established close political relations with Cuba and the Sandinista in Nicaragua. The relations gradually lost their particular revolutionary character and zeal and moved more towards the center and adoption of a generally pragmatist approach. While the relations with Cuba survived during the entire period since the heady days of the Revolution, relations with a wider and more varied combination of states, both radical and otherwise, were established and maintained. The new improvement in the relations has taken place in the backdrop of this overall pattern. An important aspect in explaining the reasons for the new surge lies in the similarity of both foreign policy orientation and domestic policy discourse of the leftist Latin American countries (e.g., Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia) and those of the Ahmadinejad administration.⁽¹⁴⁾ While advocating pro-poor, egalitarian economic policies of a predominantly redistributive character, these states also pursue a vocal anti-imperialist – anti-US – foreign policy deemed as a necessary step in countering the hostile American policies, particularly under the Bush Administration and its regional allies.

Currently, Ahmadinejad's closest ally in Latin America is Hugo Chavez, who



has been in office since 1998,⁽¹⁵⁾ is known for his anti-Americanism, his close friendship with Cuban leader Fidel Castro whom he looks upon as his mentor, and his popularity among the leftist Latin American elites.⁽¹⁶⁾ Even before the 2005 emergence of Mahmood Ahmadinejad on Iran's national scene, Chavez, leading an important OPEC member state, enjoyed quite close relations with Khatami. He first visited Iran in 2001 after visiting Saudi Arabia for talks on the oil price instability; he was on a mission to persuade other OPEC member countries to agree on oil prices, which had been adversely affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US.⁽¹⁷⁾ He made a second visit to Tehran in November 2004, when he called his country's relations with Iran strategic. Shortly afterwards Iran-Venezuela friendship society was established the same year. Khatami paid a state visit to Venezuela on three occasions during 8-year tenure.⁽¹⁸⁾ During his last visit to Caracas in 2005, the two sides signed more than twenty agreements in different areas of agriculture, construction, energy, petrochemicals, and technology.⁽¹⁹⁾ In the course of the visit Chavez gave the honorary medal of the Order of the Liberator (*"Collar de la Orden del Libertador"*) to Khatami, and pledged Venezuelan help in defense of the Iranian right to nuclear energy by declaring that: "[B]efore the threats of the government of the United States against the brother country of Iran, the Iranians can count on our support, our affection, and our solidarity."⁽²⁰⁾

As indicated earlier, soon after taking office in August 2005 President Ahmadinejad sought to establish closer ties with the leftist Latin American governments of Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia.⁽²¹⁾ As a result of the new policy, Hugo Chavez has made frequent visits to Tehran and has spoken in support of Iran's nuclear enrichment program. In September 2005 Venezuela cast a negative vote on the IAEA resolution criticizing Iran's nuclear program.⁽²²⁾ Ahmadinejad has justified his special focus on the expansion of relations with Latin American states, including more recently with Brazil, in wider terms than economic cooperation. After his visit to the South American country in December 2009, he stated: "Brazil is seeking a new order in the world and the viewpoints of its revolutionary president are close to ours." He then went on to add: "This was the first visit by an Iranian president to Brazil in the past 40 years. We have very close viewpoints with the revolutionary president of Brazil." In describing the nature of relations with Venezuela, Ahmadinejad said: "In my trip to Venezuela, 70 Iranian firms with 140 experts and



merchants made agreements worth of 5 billion dollars which is unprecedented in the history of the two countries.”⁽²³⁾

Both Chavez and Ahmadinejad have shown their desire to be portrayed as populist leaders, and have announced public policies aimed at mobilizing popular support for their leadership.⁽²⁴⁾ Hugo Chavez supported Mahmood Ahmadinejad during the June 2009 post-election crisis, and was among the first heads of state to congratulate him. They have exchanged accolades on various occasions, addressing each other as “brother,” “comrade,” and “anti-imperialist hero” in the struggle of their two “free countries.”⁽²⁵⁾ As reported in the Iranian press at the time, on the issue of Israel, Chavez said what Ahmadinejad liked to hear. They periodically have a conversation about bilateral economic cooperation, regional security in the Middle East, and on coordinating the two governments’ positions on major regional and international issues; e.g., on the Israeli military action against the aid flotilla to Gaza in June 2010.⁽²⁶⁾ The growing Tehran-Caracas cooperation has angered the Israelis, led to expressions of serious concern by Israeli officials,⁽²⁷⁾ and frequent harsh remarks have been uttered from the three capitals. The comments by Israeli officials about the growing Tehran-Caracas cooperation annoyed the Chavez government. President Shimon Peres during a visit to Argentina just before Iranian president embarked on his tour of Latin America, insulted both heads of state of Iran and Venezuela.⁽²⁸⁾ Israel condemned the “undignified” behavior of Hugo Chavez in Iran.⁽²⁹⁾ During an official visit to Uruguay, Israel’s minister of interior, Yitzhak Aharonovicz reportedly made the following remarks: “[The presence of] Iran in Latin America is without question an issue that concerns us. Following him closely, we have our fears about it. Therefore, we ask other countries to kindly react to this threat, which is not only a threat to us but to the whole world.”⁽³⁰⁾ When Israeli Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Dani Ayalon accused Venezuela of turning into “a base for the Iranian advance on the American continent,” the Venezuelan Foreign Relations Ministry issued an official statement. It said that “The Israeli government does not have the moral authority to talk about “advanced bases” of other countries in Latin America, when the Israeli government is the principal provider, after the United States, of arms, technical assistance, and mercenaries for the policy of war and destruction that the international right wing impels in the territory of our sister and neighbor, Colombia, with terrible and incalculable human consequences.”⁽³¹⁾



Since 1979, the Iranian leaders have expressed similar views about the U.S. interventionist foreign policy behaviors and its relations with Israel. The official statements reveal the Iranian leadership's vision of the threats from the U.S. Evidently, the old fears and distrust of external adversaries are still powerful, and the leaders continue to resist any attempt to normalize ties with the U.S. government. The current Iranian president believes that Washington's goal is world domination through economic and political supremacy, and that the anti-imperialist front should prevent that from happening.

An indication of the growing closeness between Tehran and Caracas is found in Venezuelan waiver of visa requirement for Iranian nationals. Based on visa waiver agreements, Iranian citizens who wish to travel to Venezuela, Nicaragua and Ecuador for short stay no longer need to obtain a visa.⁽³²⁾ The purpose is to stimulate the tourism industry and facilitate business contacts between Iran and its new allies in Latin America.⁽³³⁾ In this regard it is also of interest to note that the growing bond between the two capitals has its downside; in respect of bilateral relations with Washington. In the context of the mutual displeasure between Washington and Caracas since Chavez came to power in 1998, the US State Department has in recent years increased its pressure on Venezuela, including with respect to the question of terrorism and relating it to weekly flights from Tehran to Caracas via Damascus, and the so-called Iranian involvement. According to the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, State Department, since it is rather easy to obtain Venezuelan citizenship and passport, this Latin American country is "a potentially attractive way station for terrorists."⁽³⁴⁾

Cuba, a torch-bearer of anti-imperialist struggle and subject of US wrath at bilateral, regional and international levels, has been an important Latin American state for the Iranian leaders since 1979. Relations between the two countries was established soon after the 1979 Revolution and prospered in the 1980s, only to be somewhat moderated as of the early 1990s when – as discussed earlier – Iran pursued a more nuanced policy in Latin America and established relations with non-radical states as well. Khatami visited Havana in September 2000, and at his invitation, Cuban leader Fidel Castro traveled to Iran for the first time in May 2001.⁽³⁵⁾ Cuba, like Iran, has had difficulty with participation in regional and international organizations. Washington has practically prevented Cuba from being



readmitted into the Organization of American States (OAS) and blocked the consideration of Iran's application for accession to the World Trade Organization for a 9-year period (1995-2004). Cuba (since March 1982) and Iran (since January 1984) have been on the list of terrorist states of the U.S. State Department.⁽³⁶⁾

Another area of like-mindedness between Tehran and Havana that has irked the US Government and led to pressures against both states concerns their positions in support of reform at the United Nations, in particular the reform of the Security Council, as the most powerful UN organ and the one in which the US wields the greatest influence.⁽³⁷⁾ Of much closer current interest to Ahmadinejad and his government is Cuba's position on the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – very much similar to Iran's outlook and denunciation of the West's nuclear double standards. In early August 2010, Fidel Castro, who had been out of political limelight for quite some time, made a rare speech at the Cuban National Assembly and warned against the risk of global nuclear war, if the Obama Administration goes ahead with U.S. plans of attack against Iran and North Korea.⁽³⁸⁾ These words, coming from the Cuban veteran revolutionary, should have sounded music to Iranian officials' ears: “[N]othing is just or fair from the moment that a group of countries possessing nuclear weapons prohibit others from having them; these countries are invoking something important: that they don't want nuclear warfare, that they don't want other nations to have nuclear weapons, but while maintaining that position, they are manufacturing as many as they can, without any limits, to the extreme that, between the two major powers, they already have more than 18,000 nuclear weapons; many thousands in the United States alone...”⁽³⁹⁾

These statements, whether by Hugo Chavez, Lula Da Silva, or Fidel Castro, which are found extremely valuable to the Iranian government in the current ongoing controversy on Iran's nuclear program underline the importance of preserving the current state of relations between Tehran and the Latin American capitals – Caracas, Brasilia, and Havana, among others. The recent UNSC sanctions resolution (1929), and further unilateral sanctions by the US, the EU, and a number of other like-minded countries, have increased the significance of the current Iran-Latin America liaison, which Tehran tends to see as an emerging new power center challenging the US hegemony.⁽⁴⁰⁾



Latin American Support for Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear activities turned into an international issue in early 2003 and became a subject of scrutiny and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), where the 35-member Board of Governors have adopted a number of resolutions targeting the Iranian program. As a result, Iran has been engaged in intense diplomatic efforts in the course of the Board meetings to enlist the support of developing and non-aligned members of the Board for its position in defense of its peaceful nuclear program, which the US and other Western countries accuse of possible diversion to weaponization. Khatami's government had continued its cooperation with the IAEA, and Iran was even elected as a member state to its Board of Governors for the period 2001-2003 in the 45th regular session of the Agency's General Conference of 17-21 September 2001.⁽⁴¹⁾ Khatami favored a policy of nuclear transparency, but Iran's voluntary decision to sign the Additional Protocol to the NPT and the October 2003 Agreement did not avert the nuclear crisis. The Tehran Declaration signed by Iran and the EU-3 in October 2003 for the suspension of uranium enrichment activities were viewed as a "temporary" agreement aimed at building international trust about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. In an effort to emphasize the fact that the suspension notified to the IAEA on 14 November 2004 by Iran was a voluntary, non legally-binding trust-building measure, Khatami declared that: "When we agreed to suspend (uranium enrichment), that did not mean that we were renouncing it." He had declared that his government "will not seek permission from anyone" to gain access to civilian nuclear technology, even supposing Iran will be subjected to the UN Security Council sanctions.⁽⁴²⁾

When the EU and the United States exerted more diplomatic pressure on Iran to halt its uranium enrichment-related activities, the former president Khatami declared that: "If they still insist on depriving Iran of its rights, then we will use the technology at any cost, even if, it would no longer be under IAEA supervision." He added that the right to have uranium enrichment capability is granted in the NPT and Iran "will not give it up."⁽⁴³⁾ Iranian government continued its intensive diplomatic campaign to reassure the world that nuclear weapons had no place in Iran's national security strategy in order to generate international support from the



non-hostile and friendly countries in Europe and the Third World. During the period that Iran's nuclear program has been under close monitoring of the IAEA – and its Board of Governors - the composition of the Board has included a number of Latin American states. Venezuela and Cuba⁽⁴⁴⁾ along with Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico represented Latin America at the Board in 2004-2005. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela constituted the Agency's Latin American Board members for 2005-2006. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela were the Board members in 2006-2007.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador were represented on the IAEA Board for 2007-2008.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay served on the Board during 2008-2009.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela were elected for the period 2009-2010. Peru and Venezuela will remain on the Board for the period 2010-2011.⁽⁴⁸⁾

On 24 September 2005, the IAEA Board of Governors adopted a resolution on the implementation of safeguards in Iran. The resolution criticized Iran for its refusal to respect “the call by the Board in its resolution of 11 August 2005 to re-establish full suspension of all enrichment related activities.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ 16 Western and 6 non-Western member states of the IAEA's Board of Governors voted for the resolutions,⁽⁵⁰⁾ and 12 states abstained.⁽⁵¹⁾ Venezuela was the only member state of the Board which voted against the resolution.⁽⁵²⁾ According to the Venezuelan ambassador to Iran, Arturo Ramirez, his government “would remain by Iran's side until the end.”⁽⁵³⁾

On 4 February 2006, the IAEA's Board of Governors voted to report Iran's nuclear file to the UN Security Council. The resolution received 27 votes in its favor, five countries (Algeria, Indonesia, Belarus, South Africa, and Libya) abstained, and three countries (Cuba, Syria, and Venezuela) voted against it.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In November 2009, the IAEA Board of Governors adopted another resolution by vote which criticized Iran for the construction of an enrichment plant at Fordou near Qom without notifying the IAEA before September 2009.⁽⁵⁵⁾ 25 states, including China and Russia, voted in favor of the resolution. 6 countries (Afghanistan, Brazil, Egypt, Pakistan, South Africa, and Turkey) abstained, and 3 countries (Cuba, Malaysia, and Venezuela) opposed the resolution. Azerbaijan did not take part in the voting.⁽⁵⁶⁾ While criticizing Russia, China and the NAM



members of the Board (notably India) which had voted for the IAEA resolutions, Ahmadinejad applauded Venezuelan government which had voted against the September 2005, February 2006, and November 2009 resolutions, and for its help in rallying Latin American support for Iran's nuclear program.

It is worthwhile to add that out of the four resolutions adopted on the Iranian case by the Security Council since 2006,⁽⁵⁷⁾ the first three resolutions have been adopted unanimously; that is, all non-permanent members of the Council, inclusive of the non-aligned movement (NAM) members, voted for the resolutions. The fourth resolution (June 2010) – and the last thus far - has been the only exception which received 12 yes votes, with Lebanon abstaining, and Brazil and Turkey voting against it. Their opposition, as is well known, was related to the adoption a few weeks earlier in May in Tehran of the tri-partite Tehran Declaration on the uranium swap deal.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The review in previous lines of the Latin American conduct at the IAEA with regard to the Iranian nuclear dossier shows very clearly that the negative votes cast on various resolutions belong to the Latin American members with leftist/radical and populist outlooks; i.e., Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Other regional states – Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay – have acted differently on most resolutions. In so far as the nuclear issue is concerned, Iran's serious interest in enlisting general political support from other developing and NAM countries and the simultaneous accommodating conduct by the radical Latin American states explains, in large measure, the rationale on the part of Ahmadinejad's government to pursue, and even encourage close ties with these countries.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The wording and the tone of the statement made by the Nicaraguan ambassador Mario Barquero to Tehran in 2009 is quite indicative of the nature of this liaison: "Neither the United States nor the European Union or any other country can deprive Iran from its right of making peaceful use of nuclear energy"⁽⁶⁰⁾ – this is music to Iranian ears. Along the same lines, Iran's official news agency (IRNA) reported in mid-July 2010 (two months after the adoption of the UNSC resolution) that the five Ambassadors and heads of mission of Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela – member states of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) – issued a statement at a meeting hosted by the Embassy of Venezuela in Tehran declaring their support for Iran's nuclear program and



criticized the "destabilizing and militaristic approach of the US government and its allies, especially the Zionist regime."⁽⁶¹⁾ The landlocked country of Bolivia in South America is a relatively new ally of Iran in the region, and has also expressed its support for Iran's peaceful nuclear program.⁽⁶²⁾

Economic Aspects of Iran-Latin American Relations

According to the most current export-import statistics published by Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI), the top ten trading partners of Iran represented over %61 of Iran's exports of non-oil goods in the period March 2008 to March 2009. Their rank order based on the largest to the smallest shares of such exports were as follows: Iraq (%13.1), United Arab Emirates (%12.8), China (%11), India (%6.5), South Korea (%4.5), Japan (%3.2), Afghanistan (%3), Turkey (%2.9), Belgium (%2.3), and Saudi Arabia (%2.2). The number in parentheses is the share of each country as a percentage of total value of exports. The ten largest trading partners of Iran, which accounted for over 70% of Iran's imports of goods, are listed in the following descending order: United Arab Emirates (%24.1), Germany (%9.5), China (%8.8), Switzerland (% 6.3), South Korea (%5.5), UK (%3.6), France (%3.5), Italy (%3.5), India (%3.3), and Turkey (% 2.7).⁽⁶³⁾ The number in parentheses shows the share of each country as a percentage of total value of imports. It is not surprising that five out of ten trading partners of Iran are its neighbors in the Middle East, followed by Asian and then European countries. During the period, UAE was Iran's largest importer, and its second major export partner. China, France, India, Italy, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and the UK, which are among Iran's top import and export partners, have all voted in favor of the IAEA's resolution in 2005 and UNSC sanction resolutions since 2006.

Existing data indicate that a discernible shift has occurred in the distribution of Iran's non-oil exports. While Iran's non-oil exports used to be centered on Europe, Asian countries in 2006 represented %84.5 of the country's total exports; and European countries' share decreased to %12.3.⁽⁶⁴⁾ This, as explained by the TPOI, is the result of effective implementation of the "Look to the East" strategic policy. Moreover, as a new outlet for further economic-trade expansion different from the traditional sources, and as part of the general orientation towards Latin America, Iran has been encouraging Brazilian trade and investment in recent years.



Even though the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries has been relatively small in the past, Iranian commerce officials tend to believe that the potential for its substantial expansion exists. In the words of deputy minister of commerce in mid-April this year, Iran wants to replace the Western countries with Brazil in its foreign trade.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The value of Iran's trade with Latin American states reached \$2.9 billion in 2008, which points to the clear impact of expanding bilateral relations and a more favorable political-ideological atmosphere in the region. The top trading partners of Iran in Latin America were: Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Bolivia. According to the IMF trade statistics, the bilateral trade between Brazil and Iran amounted to \$1.3 billion, representing a %88 increase from 2007. Although Venezuela is considered the closest ally of Iran in the region, the volume of Iran's trade with this country is comparatively low, amounting to \$51.8 million in 2008, which represented a %30.8 increase over the previous year. Argentina, whose exports to Iran increased substantially between 2007 and 2008, replaced Mexico as the second largest exporters to Iran. Ecuador's trade with Iran increased from \$5.7 million in 2007 to \$168.2 million in 2008, and turned this South American country into the third largest trading partner after Brazil and Argentina. Iran's exports to Latin America in 2008 amounted to \$337.6 million (an increase of %85.2), and its imports from the region was valued at \$2.5 billion (a %240.2 increase) from 2007.⁽⁶⁶⁾

The above figures indicating substantial change in the volume of trade between Iran and Latin America during the past several years underline the fact that foreign trade and investment appear to be playing a major role in Ahmadinejad's efforts to promote Tehran's relations with the Latin American states in general, and the revolutionary/left-leaning regimes in particular. As in the case of the political aspect of expanding relations, the economic-trade aspects also have been subject of persistent analysis in Iran. Critics argue that such politically-motivated policies and measures have little, if any, economic justification, and precious national economic resources – even if funded through abundant oil revenues at the government's disposal – should be utilized for more economically-justifiable projects and undertakings, whether on the home front for growth purposes or in foreign countries closer to Iran or with more reliable political future. The supporters of the current policies tend to justify them more in political and even ideological terms



than on economic rationale; they argue that the resources allocated to the promotion of economic cooperation between Iran and these states *would* in fact move forward Iran's "global reach" – an idealistic ambition and aspiration – and would also help diversify Iran's trading partners and decrease its dependency on a handful of countries. Discounting the financial burden involved – or even disregarding it altogether – the proponents of these policies believe that Iran should grasp the opportunities provided by the changing political landscape in Latin America in order to influence the foreign policy agendas of the region's governments, particularly as they pertain either to Iran or in a bigger sense to the Middle East. Ahmadinejad has often emphasized the need for expanded economic cooperation between Venezuela and Iran as two anti-imperialist and revolutionary states.⁽⁶⁷⁾

During his visit to Caracas in November 2009, Iran agreed, among other projects, to construct an electrical power station and a water and sewage system in Venezuela, invest in that country's agricultural and fisheries sector, create bilateral banks and monetary fund, and start a new direct Tehran-Damascus-Caracas air route by the Iranian Mahan Air company.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Iran has also moved into Venezuelan energy sector. Petropars, an Iranian company affiliated with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), is one of Venezuela's partners in the development of the Ayacucho oil field in the country's heavy-crude-producing Orinoco Belt, expected to start production in 2011-2012. The two countries have also agreed to invest in a joint refinery project. They are reported to have inaugurated their first joint commercial bank in April 2009. Iranians will help the Venezuelan with the construction of dams and hydroelectric power plants. In return for the wide range of Iranian initiatives helping the Venezuelan economy, Caracas has expressed willingness to invest in the development of Iran's South Pars oil and gas field. An agreement has also been signed between the two countries for the daily export of 20,000 barrels of Venezuelan gasoline to Iran. Moreover, a joint oil company named Beniroug will be established to enable Tehran and Caracas activities in third countries, including Bolivia, China, Cuba, and Sudan.⁽⁶⁹⁾

While, as discussed, both Tehran and a number of Latin American capitals appear at the time determined to continue their close political liaison and even further consolidate gains through increasing economic and trade cooperation, it



should be borne in mind that other factors may intervene to make the relationship more difficult and costly. Aside from Washington's open displeasure and the pressures that could be brought to bear on the Latin American countries "getting out of line", especially the smaller, more vulnerable ones, one cannot be oblivious to the fact the extremely long distance and high transport costs between Iran and Latin America would make it difficult to sustain – much less increase - the economic profitability of the intended trade ties. Even though Iran's major traditional trading partners, both Asian and European, have always been outside its immediate neighborhood, the distance between Iran and Europe or Iran and Southeast Asia (Japan, China, and South Korea) are not comparable at all with the distance between Tehran and Caracas; 11756 kilometers and an approximate flight time of 15 hours. It is little wonder that the trade between Iran and Dubai – separated only by the width of the Persian Gulf – came to prosper rapidly during the Iran-Iraq War. Dubai, with a distance of 1223 kilometers from Tehran and a mere 2-hour flight time, has continued even after the end of the War to serve as a major point of re-export to Iran for a wide range of needed goods and commodities⁽⁷⁰⁾ - a function that would be expected to persevere to some considerable degree despite such militating factors as bilateral political differences or even the fallout from the recent UNSC sanctions.

Conclusions

The present article has looked into the rationale behind the post-2005 emphasis on Iran's foreign policy goal of expanding relations with the Latin American nations, especially the "revolutionary" or leftist states in the region. Although Iran's close relations with the anti-imperialist Latin American governments go back to the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Latin American cooperation under Ahmadinejad's government is remarkable. The U.S. has been blamed for blocking Iran from gaining its due regional status – let alone hegemony - and arriving at its rightful place in the post-Cold War hierarchy of international power. Unlike Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea, Iran has not been admitted to the Group of Twenty (G-20). According to the IMF, Iran's economy as measured in GDP in purchasing power parity rates was 19 in the world in 2009, and higher than some G-20 members.⁽⁷¹⁾ Moreover, the preoccupation of the Western powers with Iranian



nuclear program has allowed Israel to add to its nuclear arsenal with no interruption. The focus on the Western-induced fear of the “Iranian threat” (mostly based on the scenario of a nuclear-capable Iran) has led to the Arab states’ disregard for the more immediate and far-reaching threat of Israel’s nuclear and missile capability for the entire region. The feeling of insecurity on the part of the Iranian leaders, in the post-Cold War era drew them first into alliances with Russia and China. The “Look to the East” strategy has been constantly recommended as an alternative for replacing the developed and industrial European countries in Iran’s quest for advanced technology and foreign investment. When the “Eastern” giants (Russia, Japan and China) and the emerging power (India) sided with the “Western” powers to put pressure on Iran to abandon its enrichment programs, most Iranian political elite recognized the value of searching for other allies among the developing countries regardless of the geographical distance, or even enormous economic-financial cost. To be isolated and friendless is to be cut off from the regional and international interactions which are required for the survival of a regime.

Those who can make their opinions and reactions known through the media in Iran have supported Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy towards Latin America. The immediate goals of the current Iranian government’s emphasis on its relations with the Latin American states are to show that despite US pressure and sanctions, Iran has not become politically isolated, or deterred in gaining attention and status. Its intermediate goal is to improve Iran’s influence among the non-aligned developing states. Iranian perceptions of Russia and China as unreliable and unpredictable allies have further increased the value of smaller powers.⁽⁷²⁾ And its ultimate goal is to create an anti-imperialist front in the international system in order to facilitate the UN reform, and the transformation of the world order. All these are political rather than economic goals, and the financial rewards of the increased economic cooperation with these states are viewed as fringe benefits. Ahmadinejad has been more eager than any previous president to get close to the Latin American states. Not because it would be more profitable economically, but because it was deemed politically wise – expedient - to gain support for his anti-American policies as well as for Iran's nuclear policy throughout the Third World. The suspicious attitude of Iran’s hardliners is founded on actual and shared fears of the U.S. interventionism,



and concerns over covert proxy wars and domestic adversaries attempting to seize power. Such being the case, Iran after Ahmadinejad could be expected – most probably – to continue the expansion of its ties with the non-hostile states, including in Latin America. In general, Iran's presence in Latin America should be seen within the overall context of the geopolitical competition for influence and status.

Iranian policy makers, I presume, recognize and appreciate, – as a matter of principle - the imperative of the irreplaceable need for sound, reliable, and preferably tension-free relations with the neighboring and Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless, a government susceptible to constant outside pressure and ostracism, and facing threats of foreign aggression will usually attempt to look for friends and allies wherever possible in order to improve its deterrence and defense capabilities. Whether Iran will establish diplomatic presence in other Latin American states remain to be seen. It is clear that the states in this region have not replaced the Middle Eastern allies such as Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas in Iran's security calculations. Like Cuba, Venezuela and supportive friends of Iran in Latin America, these regional actors have also denounced the U.S. sanctions on Iran, even arguing that they are against international law. In spite of this, it is clear that as long as the Islamic Republic of Iran feels the need to look for allies in its ongoing conflict with the US and the West, the current policy of promoting closer political and economic cooperation with the friendly Latin American states, as part of a larger coalition of like-minded developing countries, can be expected to continue. The political expediency of such a policy, however, needs to be evaluated by the realistic contemplation of its long-term implementation, including its particular economic aspects and calculation. The success of any foreign policy approach, whether challenged at home or not, will be decided by the political and economic cost the country has to bear in the long run. The Islamic Republic of Iran's current policy orientation towards Latin America is no exception.

Notes

1. In 1984, Iran's Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi sent a congratulatory telegram to President Daniel Ortega, who had been a leader of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, fighting the CIA-backed Contra. While condemning the US imperialist aggression against this small Central American state, he pledged Iran's support for the struggle of the people of Nicaragua. "nakhost vazeer entekhab-e Daniel Ortega ra be riasat-e jomhuri-ye nikaragoeh tabrik ghoft," (The Prime Minister Congratulated Daniel Ortega on Winning Election to the Presidency of Nicaragua), *Ettelaat*, 13 November 1984, p. 3.
2. Fidel Castro's unforeseen meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister, Ebrahim Yazdi who had led Iran's delegation participating in the NAM Summit in Cuba, was the first encounter of the high-ranking Iranian officials with the Cuban leader in Havana. Castro discussed the threats against the Iranian Revolution and the experiences of the revolutionary Cuba in the fields of housing, defense and security, and the creation of new military forces in the urban and rural areas of the country. "dar molaghat-e ghaire motaraghebeh Fidel Castro va doktor Yazdi: vojoohe tashabohe enghelab-e iran va Cuba matrah shod," (In an Unexpected Meeting between Fidel Castro and Dr. Yazdi: The Similarities between the Revolutions in Iran and Cuba were Raised), *Kayhan*, 1 September 1979.
3. Mohammad Ali Ziaei, "Tahlil-e nazariat-e ravabet-e dojanebeh iran va amrica-ye latin (An Analysis of the Theories of Bilateral Relations between Iran and Latin America)," *faslnameh-ye siyat-e khareji* (The Journal of Foreign Policy), Summer 2008, pp. 461-478, p. 469.
4. Despite budgetary constraints, Iran has maintained its diplomatic presence all over the world. According to the official website of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran has embassies and consulates in over 100 countries, including 10 Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *List-e namayandegiha-y siyasi khareji mogheem dar jomhuri-y islami iran* (List of Foreign Missions in the Islamic Republic of Iran). Accessed on 22 August 2010. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehran/fa/mission/mission1.html>.
5. For an official view of the value of an expanded Iranian presence in Latin America, refer



- to: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Bureau for American Affairs and Department of Research and Documentation, "The Achievements of the Ninth Government in Foreign Relations with Latin American Countries," *Gozarash-e jomhoo, nameh dolat-e eslami* (Republic Report: An Annex to the Islamic State's Letter Journal), N. 25, March 2008.
6. Interestingly, the former President Mohammad Khatami along with the former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati were the members of the Iranian parliamentary delegation which visited Cuba in September 1981 for the purpose of attending the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Havana. Upon his return to Tehran, Hojjatoleslam Khatami described the meeting of the Iranian *Majlis* deputies with Fidel Castro: "For the first time, we directly listened to a Marxist revolutionary who admired the power and capacity of the revolutionary Islam." He added that Castro, like the Iranian government, believed that the wave of assassinations in Iran was due to the US imperialist machinations, and part of the conspiracies planned by the CIA and the Great Satan against the Islamic Revolution of Iran." See, "Fidel Castro: terrorha-ye akheer az dasiseha-ye emperialism amrika ast," (Fidel Castro: The Recent Assassinations are the Plots of US Imperialism), *Kayhan*, 3 October 1981, p. 14.
 7. Interview with the author, Tehran, 18 July 2010.
 8. *Ettelaat*, 24 February 1998, p. 1.
 9. The nuclear issue will be further discussed in a later section of the article.
 10. *Iran News*, Saturday, 24 February 2007.
 11. Farideh Farhi, "Tehran's Perspectives on Iran-Latin American Relations," in Cynthia Aranson, Haleh Esfandiari and Adam Stubits, eds., *Iran in Latin America: Threat or 'Axis of Annoyance'?* Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas, #23, May 2010, p. 28. Available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/Iran_in_LA.pdf
 12. Ali Asghar Moradifar, "gofteman-e edalat va hamsoee-ye siyasat-e khareji-ye iran (dolat-e nohom) ba keshvarha-ye amrika-ye lateen (The Discourse of Justice and Orientation of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Toward Latin American Countries)," *faslnameh-ye siyasat-e khareji (The Journal of Foreign Policy)*, Summer 2008, pp. 439-460, p. 445.
 13. According to an Iranian official at Latin American Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the growth in the number of leftist governments in Latin America has been an exceptional opportunity for not only strengthening Iran's relations with the states in the region, but it has also created a common ground for the formation of an alliance of revolutionary governments for the purpose of combating American imperialism. As underlined by him, this alliance could help Iran in its struggle against the unilateralist US policies in the Middle East, and the ever-increasing challenges confronting Iran in its relations with the United States. Furthermore, in his assessment, it is political significance, rather than economic benefits, that have directed the current policy of expanding economic cooperation with Latin America. The policy is hailed as a success of Ahmadinejad's government in grasping the opportunity of the open arms of the



- Latin American leftist leaders before it was lost. See, Moradifar, Op. Cit.
14. Ali Asghar Moradifar, Op. Cit., p. 443.
 15. For an account of the April 2002 coup attempt against Hugo Chavez and his return to power two days later, See, Gregory Wilpert, "The 47-Hour Coup That Changed Everything," *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 13 April 2007. Available at: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2336>.
 16. Because of the two countries' mutual interest in strengthening the OPEC, there had been continuous contacts between Tehran and Caracas long before Chavez came into power. To discuss bilateral and multilateral issues, the Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez visited Tehran during the presidency of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in January 1989. "raees jomhor-e venezuela varede tehran shod," (The President of Venezuela Arrived in Tehran," *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 18 January 1989, p. 1.
 17. "Iran, Venezuela Vow to Stabilize Oil Prices," *Iran News*, 22 October 2001, p. 1.
 18. "Iran and Venezuela both Opposed to Uni-polar World: Chavez," *Mehr News Agency (MNA)*, 29 November 2004. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=venezuela%20&NewsID=134969>
 19. "Iran, Venezuela Economic Cooperation hits \$1b," *MNA*, 11 March 2005. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=venezuela%20&NewsID=164902>.
 20. Sarah Wagner, "Venezuela's Chavez Defends Iran's Right to Atomic Energy," *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 11 March 2005.
 21. "Ahmadinejad talks to Latin American Leftist Presidents," *MNA*, 4 January 2006. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=castro%20&NewsID=274287>.
 22. To be discussed in more detail in the next section in the article.
 23. "President: My Recent Trips Represent Iran's Strategic Influence," *IRNA*, 2 December 2009. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=820846&idLanguage=3>.
 24. Manochehr Dorraj and Michael Dodson, "Neo-Populism in Comparative Perspective: Iran and Venezuela," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, V. 29, N. 1 (2009): pp. 137-151.
 25. The author acknowledges the help of Mona Yadollahi in translating the Spanish text into Farsi. See, María Lilibeth Da Corte, "Chávez: "Israel nos amenazó y actuaremos en consecuencia," *el Universal*, 26 de noviembre 2009. Available at: http://politica.eluniversal.com/2009/11/26/pol_art_chavez:-israel-nos_1670531.shtml.
 26. In January 2009, Venezuela severed *diplomatic* relations with Israel, accusing the Jewish state of genocide against the Palestinian people. Since early September 2009, the Spanish diplomatic mission has been in charge of Venezuelan consular affairs. "Chavez broke Diplomatic ties with Israel in January to protest its Military Offensive in the Gaza Strip," *Associated Press*, 16 September 2009.



27. In reference to the fact that no Israeli foreign minister had visited Latin America in 20 years, the Soviet-born Avigdor Lieberman declared that "the countries that have been neglected need to be taken care of - both in Latin America and in Africa." During his 10-day trip starting on 21 July 2009, he visited Brazil and then Argentina, Peru and Colombia, and frequently implied in his statements that a reason for the strategic importance of Latin America is Iran's involvement with selected governments in this region. Barak Ravid, "Lieberman Ignores Charges, Dwells on Latin America Trip," *Haaretz*, 3 August 2009. Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/lieberman-ignores-charges-dwells-on-latin-america-trip-1.281259>.
28. According to the Venezuelan President, Peres had stated that "Chavez and Ahmadinejad would soon perish." Chavez in turn called Israeli government's aggressive policies as an extension of the US imperialism. He asserted that imperialism and the global oppression will be defeated, and Iran, Venezuela and the other revolutionary nations will be victorious. "Chavez: Ahmadinejad's presence in Latin America Strengthens our Hearts," *IRNA*, 26 November 2009. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=811479&cidLanguage=3>; and "Peres in Argentina: Ahmadinejad, Chavez will Fall," *Associated Press*, 17 November 2009. Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/peres-in-argentina-ahmadinejad-chavez-will-fall-1.3979>.
29. "Israel denuncia la "indigna" conducta de Hugo Chávez en Irán," *el Universal*, 06 de septiembre, 2009. Available at: http://www.eluniversal.com/2009/09/06/int_ava_israel-denuncia-la_06A2706971.shtml.
30. "Preocupa a Israel creciente influencia de Irán en Latinoamérica," *el Universal*, 09 de marzo 2010. Available at: http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/03/09/int_ava_preocupa-a-israel-cr_09A3557611.shtml.
31. James Suggett, "Venezuela Says Israeli Criticisms of Its Relationship with Iran Lack Moral Authority," *Venezuelanalysis.com*, 5 November 2009. Available at: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/4918>.
32. The eligibility of Iranian visitors to travel to these states will be determined at their ports of entry. The immediate result of the visa waiver policy has been that Iranian tour operators and travel agencies are now advertising a host of Latin American tour packages including the Amazon jungle tours, Caribbean cruises and tours of Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. The costs of these vacation packages are much higher compared to the Antalya (Turkey) or Dubai tours which are popular among the Iranian middle class.
33. "Venezuela Lifts Visa Requirement for Iranian Nationals," *Fars News Agency (FNA)*, 11 January 2010. Available at: <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8810211438>.
34. U.S. State Department, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Chapter 2, Country Reports: Western Hemisphere Overview, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*, 30 April 2008. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122435.htm>.



35. His schedule included rounds of talks with Iranian officials and the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, joining Khatami in a news conference, and participating in a wreath-laying ceremony at the mausoleum of the late Imam Khomeini. *IRNA*, 8 May 2001.
36. As alleged by the State Department, Iran is “the most active state sponsor of terrorism,” because the Tehran government “provided aid in the form of weapons, training, and funding to HAMAS and other Palestinian terrorist groups, Lebanese Hizballah, Iraq-based militants, and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.” U.S. State Department, “Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism” in *Country Reports on Terrorism*, Accessed on 8 August 2010. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm>.
37. “Cuba Demands Increase in the Number of UN Security Council Members,” *Cuban News Agency (ACN)*, 30 June 2010. Available at: <http://www.cubanews.ain.cu/2010/0630cuba-demands-increase-number-un-security-council-members.htm>.
38. Raising a question about Iran’s determination to react in case of coming under any attack, Castro asked: “Does anyone think the Iranians, a people with a culture of thousands of years and which is much more intertwined with death than ours, will lack the courage we have shown in resisting the demands of the United States?” In his interview with Venezuelan journalists after his speech at the National Assembly, Castro expressed his great concern about global nuclear war and added: “In Iran the war will turn nuclear, and all the causes giving rise to the interventions that we know of to date would disappear.” “Castro warns of ‘Nuclear Holocaust,’” *Tehran Times*, 9 August 2010. Available at: http://www.tehrantimes.com /index_View.asp?code=224466.
39. *Ibid.*
40. As underlined by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in a meeting with Hugo Chavez in early September 2009 in Tehran. *IRNA*, 6 September 2009. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=669329&idLanguage=3>.
41. “Newly Elected IAEA Board of Governors,” *IAEA Press Release 2001/16*, 20 September 2001. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/PressReleases/2001/prn0120.shtml>.
42. “Nation Prepared to Pay Price for Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy: Khatami,” *MNA*, 11 August 2004. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=iaea%20khatami%20 &NewsID=102923>.
43. “Referral of Iran to Security Council would be a sign of IAEA Failure: Kathami,” *MNA*, 22 September 2004. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=iaea%20khatami%20& NewsID=11433>
44. Cuba, which had signed the NPT in 2002, was elected in September the same year to serve on the Board for the period 2002-2004. See, “Newly Elected Board of Governors,” *GC 46 Daily Wrap*, 16-20 September 2002, Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC46/DailyWrap/wrap1909.html>.
45. “New Members Elected to the IAEA Board of Governors,” *Staff Report*, 22 September 2006. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/News/2006/board2006->



- 2007.html.
46. "Board of Governors Elects New Officers," *Staff Report*, 24 September 2007. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/News/2007/BGChairman.html>.
 47. "Board of Governors Elects New Officers," *Staff Report*, 6 October 2008. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/News/2008/bog061008.html>.
 48. "New Members Elected to the IAEA Board of Governors," *GC 53 Daily Wrap*, 14-18 September 2009. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC53/index.html#day-4>.
 49. IAEA Board of Governors, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Resolution adopted on 24 September 2005*, GOV/2005/77, 24 September 2005, p. 2, Section k. Available at: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-77.pdf>.
 50. Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Ecuador, France, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovakia, Sweden, and US.
 51. Algeria, Brazil, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Vietnam, and Yemen.
 52. "International Consensus against Iran Fails," *MNA*, 24 September 2004. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=iaea%20venezuela%20&NewsID=233325>
 53. He added that President Chavez plans to pursue a policy of developing Venezuela's civilian nuclear program following in the footsteps of Argentina and Brazil. "Venezuela will not waver in Defense of Iran's Nuclear Program: Envoy," *MNA*, 5 October 2005. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=iaea%20venezuela%20&NewsID=238102>.
 54. The 2006 resolution specified that the Board of Governors "deeply regrets that, despite repeated calls from the Board for the maintaining of the suspension of all enrichment related and reprocessing activities which the Board has declared essential to addressing outstanding issues, Iran resumed uranium conversion activities at its Isfahan facility on 8 August 2005 and took steps to resume enrichment activities on 10 January 2006." It further requested Iran to "re-establish full and sustained suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development, to be verified by the Agency." It is of interest to note that in mid-December 2005 President Ahmadinejad had issued an order to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) for the implementation of a law passed by the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) a few months earlier in Summer 2005 - following the end of the term of office of the reformist Khatami and Ahmadinejad's victory - calling on the government to end all voluntary measures, including the suspension of enrichment activities and the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the NPT. In retrospect, the toughening of the position in Tehran appears to have assisted a similar toughening of the position at the IAEA and finally led to the referral of the case to the Security Council in early February 2006.



- “IAEA reports Iran to Security Council,” *MNA*, 4 February 2006. Available at: <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?pr=s&query=iaea%20venezuela%20&NewsID=286930>.
55. IAEA Board of Governors, Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Resolution adopted by the Board of Governors on 27 November 2009, GOV/2009/82, 27 November 2009.
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 57. 1737 (December 2006); 1747 (March 2007); 1835 (September 2008); and 1929 (June 2010).
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 60. “No State can take away Iran’s Right to use Nuclear Energy,” *IRNA*, 17 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1230416&idLanguage=3>.
 61. “Cuba reaffirms Support for Iran over National Nuclear Program,” *IRNA*, 14 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1226961&idLanguage=3>.
 62. “Ambassador: Bolivian Nation’s Officials Support Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *IRNA*, 17 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1230384&idLanguage=3>.
 63. Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, *Gozarash-e tafseeli-ye tejarat: vazeyat-e saderat-e kalaha-ye ghayre nafti va varedat-e kala* (Detailed Trade Report: The Status of Export of Non-oil Commodities and Imports of Commodities), Tehran: TPOI, March 2009, pp. 12 and 27. Available at: <http://fa.tpo.ir/UserFiles/File/botan37-87.pdf>.
 64. Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, *namayeh-e Amari: barese-ye vazeyat-e taraz-e tejure jomhore-ye islami-ye iran* (Statistical Profile: An Analysis of the Status of Islamic Republic of Iran’s Balance of Trade), Tehran: TPIO, June 2006, p. 3.
 65. “Brezil be jam-a bozorgtarin shorakaye tejari-ye iran mipayvandar (Brazil will Join Iran’s Top Trading Partners),” *Econews.ir*, 12 April 2010. Available at: http://www.econews.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_127131.asp.
 66. “Latin America: Iran Trade Triples,” *Latin Business Chronicle*, 2 December 2009. Available at: <http://www.latinbusinesschronicle.com/app/article.aspx?id=3842>.
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 68. According to a recent report, the direct flight has stopped due to insufficient number of



- passengers. "Iran and Venezuela Sign 12 Documents of Cooperation," *IRNA*, 26 November 2009. Available at: <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=811497&idLanguage=3>.
69. "Iran, Venezuela to Launch Joint Oil Company," *Fars News Agency*, 28 October 2009. Available at: <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8808061393>.
70. In comparison, the distance between Tehran and selected major capital cities are as follows: Moscow (2464.4 km), Berlin (3518 km), Paris (4223 km), Beijing (5603), Washington DC (10201), Brasilia, Brazil (11861), Havana, Cuba (11887), La Paz, Bolivia (13728 km), Santiago, Chile (14791 km).
71. The Middle Eastern GDP based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) as a % of world total GDP in 2009 was only 4.021, but the estimated value of Iran's GDP was the highest in this regional grouping. The International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2010. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/weodata/download.aspx>.
72. Unlike Russia, China is cautious about its nuclear cooperation with Iran. Both are eager to pursue a peaceful resolution of the current international dispute over the nuclear program, and acknowledge that Iran has a legitimate right to peaceful nuclear technology, and that the security concerns of Iran should be understood. Being the major trading partners of Iran, both states are reluctant to impose harsh sanctions against the country in such a way that might hurt their trade ties.