Iran’s Influence in the Americas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Iran's Influence
In the Americas
Executive Summary

Through trade, assistance, and bilateral cooperation, the nations of the Americas are more globally connected than ever before. Not just to former colonial powers, but to such faraway places as Afghanistan, China, India, Russia, and Singapore. In 2007, Colombian police were training Afghan counterparts. China's commerce with Latin America and the Caribbean has grown from about $12 billion in 2000 to some $176.8 billion in 2010.1 India's trade is on track to double from $23 billion in 2010 to $50 billion in 2014.2 Russia has more extensive commercial and political ties in the hemisphere than it did during the Cold War. And Singapore is now Venezuela's fifth-largest trading partner. Yet, another foreign power has made inroads and is provoking worries that for now are larger than its actual impact. It is the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Once a U.S. ally during the reign of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (1941–1979), and then hostile to the United States following the shah's overthrow in 1979, Iran has sought foreign partners to project an image of global power, expand trade, intertwine its finances more tightly into the international banking system, and forge political alliances. By most measures, it has been only partly successful, managing to have a small amount of influence with a handful of governments. Although that may not present an existential threat to the United States, it could mean trouble for the hemisphere if Iran decided to raise tensions through renewed support for terrorism or development of a nuclear weapon.

Considering such possibilities, it is important to understand the motives of Iran and its partners in exploiting links, as well as the assets and liabilities of such relationships for each side as Iran tries to gain a foothold. An evaluation of its outreach to the hemisphere before the Islamic revolution, its outreach efforts since then, the role of its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, and the state of its nuclear program are critical to understanding possible implications for the United States. Overestimating a potential Iranian threat could lead to reactions more damaging than anything Iran could do by degrading U.S. relations with neighboring governments and publics. Underestimating a potential threat could send the wrong message about U.S. seriousness to counter challenges to its interests and those of democratic allies.

To minimize the negative aspects of Iran's influence in the Americas, the United States should:

- Improve intelligence collection to obtain a clearer picture of Iran's hemispheric activities;
- Press neighbors with Iranian ties to encourage Iran to be a better global citizen;

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- Try to repair its own faltering relations in the hemisphere;
- Develop a broader, more competitive base of cooperation in the region;
- State dangers less in terms of threats posed to the United States and more in terms of what they mean to the Western Hemisphere community; and
- Bring news of Iran’s hemispheric engagement as well as the reality of daily life in this region to audiences in Iran.

**Historical Backdrop**

While much of Iran’s interest in the hemisphere seems to date from the beginning of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency in 2005, its roots go back much further—to the 1850s when Iran sought U.S. help in keeping European powers at bay. Diplomatic links between Iran and other American states such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela gradually followed. Oil diplomacy, a desire to exploit nuclear energy and possibly develop a nuclear weapon, and an attempt to seek closer ties with the developing world all emerged during the shah’s time. Iran’s left-leaning revolution broke ties with the United States and shifted allegiances toward countries in the Americas such as Marxist Cuba and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas.

Two years after Venezuelans elected left-leaning Hugo Chávez to their presidency in 1998, President Muhammad Khatami (1997–2005) began cultivating a pivotal friendship. Later, when other populist autocrats were elected in Bolivia and Ecuador, Chávez introduced Iran’s current leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to them. Iran renewed ties with Nicaragua when former Sandinista *comandante* Daniel Ortega returned to the presidency in 2007. As occasional attempts at rapprochement with the United States had not been productive in Iran’s eyes, Iran turned to these other countries to sidestep a growing list of international sanctions against its support for Hezbollah and then its nuclear program. Such links also overcame diplomatic isolation and served to keep Washington’s foreign policy community off balance.

Today, the advantages of such ties may be fleeting. Cuba’s 50-year dictatorship is transitioning away from its former hard line and could be curtailed by the advancing age of its leadership. Core members of its Bolivarian alliance have elected governments, albeit autocratic, that could lose future elections. And elections or an ongoing health crisis could take Venezuela’s Chávez out of power. To be sure, Iran has diplomatic relations with a number of American states and embassies in 11 of them.3 Most ties are commercial, however, and, at that, Iran is mostly an importer. What is unclear is whether Iran’s current government has further capacity to develop influence in the region—considering the appeal of its public diplomacy efforts, other countries’ wariness about terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah, and the viability of trade and aid offerings.

**Cultural Affinities**

On the surface, it might seem that the Middle Eastern diaspora in the Americas would provide an open channel for Iran to project influence. However, populations of Middle Eastern descent represent a small minority in the Americas, most living in North America, Brazil, and Argentina. The vast majority are Arab and Christian. Those of Persian descent live mostly in the United States

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3. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay.
and Canada. Muslims constitute a minority in the overall group, and Shia (the most common form of Islam practiced in Iran) adherents are a smaller subgroup still. Of them, only a small portion might be considered likely targets for cooperating with Tehran or turning against the United States. Where Iran has been able to build ties is among Hezbollah operatives, Arabs who emigrated as a result of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), and a few individuals within the sway of pro-Iranian Shia clerics.

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy, strategic communication, and soft power refer to activities used by almost all governments to polish their public image and ensure a welcome reception for bilateral cooperation and trade. Iran is no different in using these tools and has, in fact, taken a page from the United States’ playbook—using presidential visits, public events, official statements, broadcasting, the Internet, and focused foreign assistance/civic action to elicit favorable reactions from targeted populations. So far, there is little evidence that such efforts have been effective, as public perceptions of Iran seem to be highly unfavorable where survey data are available. In fact, one survey in 2010 found that large majorities in Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil opposed Iran’s possible acquisition of a nuclear weapon, although they generally favored sanctions over military action to prevent Iran from obtaining one.

Visits to the Americas by senior Iranian leaders began under the soft-spoken President Khataomi. Succeeding him, President Ahmadinejad adopted a more aggressive travel schedule and more strident, anti-Western rhetoric. As of January 2012, Ahmadinejad has visited the region six times. By comparison, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has visited Iran nine times, Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega has gone three times, Bolivian president Evo Morales twice, Ecuador’s Rafael Correa once, Guyanese president Bharrat Jagdeo once, and Brazilian president Inacio Lula da Silva once. Iran’s international broadcasting service dates from 1926. Today, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has domestic and international coverage, with audiences in 45 countries and among 25 languages. IRIB reportedly has eight national television channels and six satellite channels for international viewers. IRIB runs its own website (www.irib.ir), which is translated from Persian into 24 languages corresponding to radio services, including Spanish and English. Stories resemble those on the United States’ Voice of America, except for their anti-Western orientation and, at times, obvious propagandistic slant. A number of Spanish-language Shia Islamist websites are also directed toward Latin America. Most of these feature anti-American and anti-Israel messages, seek to explain the Iranian revolution, and promote conversion or “reversion” from other Muslim sects to Shiism.

State-to-state cooperation on international communications is also evolving. In December 2004, Iran’s IRIB system and Venezuela’s state-run Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) signed an agreement to collaborate on a digital newsroom, build a provincial station, and exchange television series and programming. In March 2008, Iran and Bolivia agreed to a package of joint projects valued at some $1 billion. Later, Iran announced it had dropped plans to broadcast in Bolivia

in favor of a content-sharing agreement with Bolivia’s state media. In May 2011, Iran’s Foreign Ministry and the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television announced a joint network venture.

**Investments and Trade**

On the financial front, Iran tends to fund aid projects for public relations purposes and joint ventures that highlight bilateral cooperation and state industries. Venezuela leads other Western Hemisphere countries in such arrangements. In almost all cases, projects seem directed at political objectives or possible clandestine technology transfers, not at profits. Iran’s investments in tractor and automobile factories in Venezuela have underproduced and reportedly turned out substandard products. A joint airline route between Caracas and Tehran commenced in 2007 yet was suspended in 2010, apparently lacking riders. Elsewhere, cement plants and dairy processing facilities have been built in remote locations that, while serving a need, do not seem economically viable.

**Banking**

With regard to finances, Tehran has attempted to use its Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) to tap into Western Hemisphere banks. Venezuela agreed to open a branch in 2008. Known as the International Development Bank (Banco Internacional de Desarrollo, C.A.), it provided such traditional public services as checking and savings accounts, car loans, and credit cards. In October 2008, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed economic sanctions on EDBI for allegedly helping Iran’s Defense Ministry finance its weapons programs. In April 2009, Ahmadinejad and Chávez proceeded to inaugurate the Tehran-based Iran-Venezuela Joint Bank, capitalized with contributions of $100 million from each country. Shortly thereafter, the Venezuela-Iran Single Binational Fund opened in Caracas. In 2010, the European Union said it would freeze all funds and resources belonging to the Venezuelan branch of EDBI for alleged ties to Iran’s nuclear program.

Despite U.S. sanctions, the directors of the Central Bank of Ecuador approved a protocol establishing a relationship with EDBI in November 2008 to promote bilateral trade with Iran. In 2010, however, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF, which combats financial crimes) placed Ecuador on its watch list for failing to comply with regulations concerning money laundering. Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa reacted angrily, but promised his government would no longer deal with Iran’s sanctioned banks. Still, in October 2010, Bolivian president Evo Morales signed agreements that called for a branch of the EDBI in Bolivia and the creation of a binational bank with the participation of public and private capital from both countries. In addition, Iran offered a credit line of $278 million to Bolivia for 16 years at a fixed annual interest rate of 2.7 percent.

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Bilateral Trade

Commerce between Iran and the Americas has grown dramatically over the last decade, but it is still insignificant compared to trade within the region and with other partners outside the hemisphere. By most accounts, trade between Iran and the region tripled between 2008 and 2009. In 2010, the exchange amounted to some $3.5 billion. By comparison, China-Latin America trade in 2010 amounted to almost $180 billion, and U.S. trade with the region amounted to $636 billion. Even so, Latin America represents only about 2 percent of Iran's total trade with the world and, at that, commerce is mostly concentrated in South America's two large economies, Argentina and Brazil. In contrast, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua (Iran's closest political allies in the Americas) were net importers of Iranian goods. In most cases, however, such exchanges were small and erratic.

Iran has other, larger partnerships in the Middle East, Central Asia, and China. Furthermore, it enjoys a favorable market position as a major petroleum exporter. Always in high demand, oil makes up some 80 percent of Iran's export sales. Non-petroleum products (a sector that Iran would like to expand) consist mainly of pistachios, carpets, methanol, and automobiles. Despite a scarcity of arable land and unreliable rainfall, the country is 90 percent self-sufficient in food production, and wheat is its number-one crop. During the last decade, it has mostly enjoyed a trade surplus. Moreover, high oil prices have allowed it to report a buildup in foreign reserves totaling some $100 billion.

Ties to Terrorists

There is strong circumstantial evidence that Iran has had ties to terror groups operating in the Americas—most specifically Hezbollah, formed in the 1980s as a paramilitary anti-Israeli resistance organization during the Lebanese civil war. Hezbollah was inspired by Iran's revolution and the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, and Iran is believed to have supplied initial financing while its Revolutionary Guards trained some cadres. Over the years, Iran's links to Hezbollah seem to have weakened although its operatives could still serve as a fifth column in the Americas. Moreover, Hezbollah is now the dominant political power in Lebanon and may be less focused on overseas terror operations than when it started.

In the Americas, its major terror events were the bombing of the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the Jewish community center in 1994 in Buenos Aires. Evidence such as signal intercepts suggests

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coordination with senior Iranian officials. Unfortunately, early investigations by Argentine prosecutors were flawed and follow-ups have failed to develop conclusive proof. Still, in 2007 Interpol put five former Iranian officials, including current defense minister Ahmad Vahidi, on its “red list” for having planned and carried out the community center bombing. As for Hezbollah, its operations during the last decade seem to have centered on raising funds by selling pirated goods, smuggling arms and drugs, and extorting money from Arab immigrant communities.

**Nuclear Diplomacy**

Iran has had a nuclear program since the shah era and is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. As a nonnuclear (weapons) state, the convention allows Iran to develop a civilian nuclear energy program. However, considering the rigidity of Iran’s theocracy, the apocalyptic ideas of some of its leaders, and senior leader statements that “Israel should be wiped off the map,” the potential for developing nuclear weapons from such a program is worrisome. Despite numerous offers to supply it with low-enriched uranium for its research reactors, Iran has developed a native enrichment capability that could produce weapons-grade fuel. Reports of Iranian agreements with Bolivarian governments to participate in mineral exploration have fed speculation as to whether Iran is importing uranium from the west, in defiance of international sanctions.

Available information suggests that while Iran does not have sufficient uranium to run several thermonuclear power generating plants (another long-term goal), it may have enough for four to five nuclear warheads and could obtain more from its own mines or those in nearby countries without having to mill and ship concentrate from the Americas. Nevertheless, cooperation in mining projects and participation in the development of nuclear programs elsewhere could help it obtain components and strategic materials for its own enrichment or weapon manufacturing efforts. Relaxed customs protocols with Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador could facilitate such a transfer. By way of example, South Korean authorities found 400 suspect tubes in jet cargo headed for Iran in 2010. And in December 2011, Russian customs officials seized steel boxes containing natrium, a radioactive isotope of sodium, that were to be loaded on a flight bound for Tehran.

**Bilateral Relations**

Within the hemisphere, Iran has sought links with a broad range of countries, from democratic, free market states to a handful of authoritarian, anti-U.S. regimes. From a political standpoint, the
most productive have been investments in a Caracas-Tehran axis that has facilitated ties within Venezuela’s Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) alliance. In that framework, joint ventures figure prominently in Iran’s standardized assistance portfolio: tractor factories, dairy facilities, and cement plants, plus hydrocarbon and mineral exploration. Elsewhere, Iran has sought access to agricultural commodities in emerging large economies like Brazil and Argentina. Where countries are not sympathetic to anti-Western rhetoric or authoritarianism, Iran has established a cultural presence to forge links with small Muslim communities. Most of these relationships, costly and unprofitable, seem disadvantageous from a U.S. perspective. Back in Tehran, they showcase Iran’s profile as a world power—portrayed as more influential than Saudi Arabia and Israel, and as a check on U.S. influence in the Middle East, the Americas, and the world.

Argentina and Brazil are Iran’s largest trade partners in the hemisphere. However, Argentine concerns about Iran’s possible complicity in the 1990s terrorist bombings in Buenos Aires cloud potential improvements. And in Brazil, there is growing wariness over whether Iran will flout international nuclear conventions plus unease over efforts to convert young Brazilian men to Shia Islam. Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Uruguay have small trade relationships, but otherwise abstain from aligning themselves with Iran’s anti-Western positions. In contrast, Venezuela has become Iran’s beachhead for strategic communications, banking, and joint ventures. By 2007, its president was the gatekeeper for relationships with newly elected anti-U.S. presidents in Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador.

Tehran-Caracas Axis

Venezuela and Iran were the founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960, and today their partnership is the most extensive and symbiotic among the hemisphere’s capitals. While both countries rely on national petroleum industries for income, Iran is more industrialized and its economy (18th largest in the world) is more than twice the size of Venezuela’s. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez sees Iran as a major investor, supplier, and linchpin among Islamic countries in containing U.S. global influence. Moreover, Iran’s economic assistance is welcome in funding social projects that Venezuela’s own oil export earnings cannot support.

Joint projects. Outside of the two countries’ foreign ministries, probably no one knows how many agreements have been struck, but press releases and news stories suggest as many as 200, and one account in Venezuela’s daily El Universal last year reported 270.20 The value of loans and investments could be calculated at $15 billion by adding up the stated values of known joint ventures, capitalizations, loans, and investments. Or it may exceed $20 billion as declared by Venezuela’s deputy minister for basic industry and mining, Gustavo Hernández, in April 2007. In any case, the lack of transparency in which many of these accords were struck makes it difficult to assess how many are active, completed, or even real.

Oil and gas cooperation has been the cornerstone of binational ventures for the two OPEC founders. Nonetheless, it has been one of the most problematic areas of collaboration. Despite an agreement signed in 2005, exploration and certification leading to a multibillion-dollar venture in the Orinoco oil belt seems to be mired in preliminary studies while the two governments renegotiate contracts. Joint venture factories such as tractor, car, bicycle, cement, dairy, and plastics plants

set up as “socialist” production models have stumbled. Tractors have been given away or leased to state cooperatives. Automobile production was predicted to be 25,000 units per year, but in 2011 reached only 3,773 according to an Iranian news release. A cement plant planned in 2005 reportedly will not open until mid-2012.

President Chávez has clearly stated his intent to help Iran develop its nuclear program and has spoken openly of Iran’s involvement in Venezuela’s mineral and uranium prospecting. In 2008, the Venezuelan state-run mining company, CVG Minerven, granted the Iranian firm Impasco rights to a gold mine concession in the Roraima Basin, a massive geological formation bordering Guyana known for iron, bauxite, gold, and, more recently, discoveries of uranium ore. In 2009 Chávez boasted, “We’ve already been working for years with the mining ministry of Iran. If you all knew the amount of mining resources that we have discovered in the last few years you’d fall on your backs: gold, diamond, precious rocks and other minerals.” How much is exaggeration is hard to say, as Venezuela is well endowed with mineral resources. Yet, by comparing official estimates, it does not seem to have as much uranium as Iran, nor the capability to process and concentrate it. For now, nuclear cooperation may take the form of helping Iran obtain critical technology.

Security interests. Able to make billion-dollar purchases of Russian and Chinese arms, Chávez has also appeared willing to help Iran in defense. So much so that the U.S. Department of State levied sanctions (under the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act) on Venezuela’s Military Industries Company for allegedly passing on goods and technology that could be used to assist in Iran’s weapons program. On October 19, 2010, President Chávez flew to Tehran after meetings in Moscow where he agreed to purchase S-300 air defense missile systems that Russia had withheld from Iran because of UN Security Council sanctions. News stories suggested that Chávez offered to transfer them to Iran; however, Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied plans to acquire them from Venezuela.

In November 2010, the German newspaper Die Welt followed up with a feature citing “Western security sources” that Presidents Chávez and Ahmadinejad had reached a secret agreement the previous month to let Iran build a medium-range missile base on Venezuelan soil. The alleged objective would be to deter the United States from attacking Iran by threatening America close to

24. Exploration is ongoing, but Venezuelan officials have told journalists that their country’s uranium reserves stand at about 50,000 tons. See Tim Padgett, “Chavez to Iran: How About Some Uranium?,” Time, October 8, 2009, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1929256,00.html. In contrast, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran estimates that Iran’s Saghand mine may contain as much as 1.73 million tons of medium-quality ore. See Ali Akbar Dareini, “Iran says key site has higher uranium ore reserves,” Associated Press, October 19, 2010, http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/nationworld/2013200168_apiiranuclear.html?syndication=rss.
home—as the Soviet Union had done when it installed medium-range ballistic nuclear missiles in Cuba. For the time being, there seems to be no substance to the report.

The Rest of ALBA

With regard to other countries within Venezuela’s orbit such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, relations are less intense and generally less beneficial for Iran. For example, Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega has received assistance from Iran yet maintains cordial relations with the United States and other Western democracies. Iran’s relationship with Bolivia, however, could be lucrative. In 2007, Iran promised Bolivia $1.1 billion in the form of a cooperation agreement. In 2010, Presidents Evo Morales and Ahmadinejad signed a memorandum of understanding that named Iran as a co-developer of Bolivia’s lithium deposits at Salar de Uyuni, which comprise 50 to 70 percent of known global reserves. lithium is a key element used in rechargeable batteries for items from hybrid autos to cell phones.

Conclusions

Iran’s activities in the Western Hemisphere raise a number of warning flags, although some may be distractions. Its choice of allies—beginning with Cuba, and now consisting mainly of Venezuela and core members of its Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas alliance—all have current leaders that share an authoritarian ideology hostile to liberal democracy and especially to the United States. To the extent these countries might help Iran spread terror or develop a nuclear weapon, they would be complicit in projecting a global threat. Yet much of that depends on guidance from Venezuela’s president. Should he suddenly leave office, support for the Islamic Republic in the Americas would be surely diminished.

On close inspection, U.S. policymakers might not see all Iranian activities in the Western Hemisphere as security threats, and thus might calibrate responses in order not to strain relations with those Latin American countries that have relations with Iran. Regrettably, much of what is known about Iran’s activities in the Americas is based on incomplete evidence. Overstating the case for action could set back relations with friendly neighbors and make cooperation, if needed, less likely. Understating it could lead to complacency or loss of trust. Given the hostility of the current Iranian leadership toward the United States, U.S. policymakers might consider measures to:

- **Redouble efforts to better observe and understand** the degree to which Iran is circumventing sanctions, transferring technology and materials, establishing an Iranian Guard presence, engaging terror groups such as Hezbollah or even Colombia’s FARC guerrillas, engaging in terrorism itself, or contemplating a missile base in Venezuela as has been alleged. Early warning enables the most effective defense.

- **Press neighbors with Iranian ties to encourage Iran to be a better global citizen.** Considering the current turmoil between Iran’s elected president, its parliament, and hard-line theocratic rulers, now is not the time to seek rapprochement, as it is difficult to know who is making decisions. However, a dialogue with Tehran’s elected government to communicate what is acceptable in the framework of U.S. and regional interests is always useful.

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Fix broken ties. Rather than wring hands over Iran’s inroads among close neighbors, senior U.S. leaders and diplomats should try to repair faltering relationships. In fact, that is beginning to happen. A framework agreement exists with Bolivia to upgrade three years of downgraded ties with a new U.S. ambassador. The United States and Ecuador will soon exchange new ambassadors after several months in which top representation was absent.

Develop a broader, more competitive stance for U.S. cooperation in the region. U.S. trade, aid, and collaboration are properly legalistic and detail oriented, reflecting an accountable approach to foreign relations. However, leader-to-leader agreements typical of authoritarian regimes that can be quickly drawn up and implemented may seem a more effective model of leadership to some publics in the hemisphere. U.S. lawmakers and policymakers should consider ways to streamline cooperative agreements without making them any less accountable.

Characterize support for Hezbollah and transferring nuclear technology less as a U.S. concern and more as a danger to hemispheric and global communities. An Iranian military buildup and acquisition of a nuclear weapon is in no one’s best interest. And finally,

Bring news of Iran’s hemispheric engagement to Persian audiences. Iranian citizens should know that Western reality is different from the theocratic vision of their leaders and the flattering images that state media show of Ahmadinejad’s trips. They should know of the region’s overall progress in human rights, civil liberties, economic freedom, religious tolerance, and relations with a multiplicity of external actors, from China to the United States. To the degree that U.S. public diplomacy is needed to augment the ability of commercial media to do that job, it should play a role.

Iran is not the only extra-hemispheric power eager to exploit relations with American states. A multiplicity of actors from around the globe including Iran all have a presence in the hemisphere. To the extent that each engages in a friendly competitive fashion, they will be welcome. To the extent that they engage in what others believe to be useless or destructive behavior, they will limit their prospects. Authoritarianism and anti-U.S. sentiments have deep roots in the Americas, to be sure. However, the dominant trend is toward democracy, decentralization, and governments that serve the popular will. Like growing intolerance for dictatorships in the Middle East, vestiges of authoritarianism may be poised for a reversal in the Americas, with the mortality of the Castro brothers in Cuba and the possibility that, for whatever reason, Hugo Chávez might leave power in Venezuela. Connections based on affinities between charismatic leaders, while lasting for decades, can vanish in an instant.

As previous studies on this subject have concluded, Iran’s influence in the Americas will not be the same next year as it is now, and so the matter will require continued vigilance and assessment. Yet one thing is certain: Iran is an old civilization and its current, grim leaders believe it has an important place in the world. For now, they may think their destiny is to speak for the Islamic world and to oppose Western powers they feel have done them wrong. Perhaps sometime in the future, the United States and other democratic societies can help this distant society understand that it has a place within the community of nations, sharing the richness of its culture without seeking to dominate or control others.
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