

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

[Asia Times Online](#)

Iran's new revolutionary politics

By Chris Zambelis
6/19/2010

Brazil's decision, along with fellow non-permanent United Nations Security Council member Turkey, to vote against the latest United States-led efforts to impose harsher sanctions against Iran on June 9 aimed at stymieing the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, reflects a sea-change in global geopolitics characterized by a decline in US power and the return of multi-polarity.

Brazil's refusal to support UN Security Council Resolution 1929 came on the heels of a successful joint Brazilian-Turkish attempt to win Iranian agreement on May 17 to enter into a uranium exchange pact designed to allay concerns about Tehran's nuclear ambitions and to avert a more serious escalation of regional tensions.

Brazil's bold drive to inject itself into the center of one of the most contentious issues in international affairs, coupled with its move to join Turkey in overtly challenging the dominant US-led diplomatic paradigm when it comes to dealing with Iran, are emblematic of Brasilia's aspirations of achieving a great-power status commensurate with what it perceives to be its true diplomatic, economic and military strength.

Brazil's venture into Middle East diplomacy should therefore be considered in the context of its steady ascent to international prominence. Brazil's diplomatic defense of Iran, however, also highlights the significance of Tehran's bond with the South American powerhouse.

While many observers continue to marvel at Brazil's emerging stature as a player in Middle East diplomacy, another significant, albeit far less understood, geopolitical trend with major implications occurring in the US's backyard in the Western hemisphere has grabbed headlines in recent years.

Iran has undertaken its own ambitious mission in recent years to expand its influence across Latin America and the Caribbean, a region where it has traditionally maintained little or no meaningful diplomatic, economic or military presence until fairly recently. The expanding Iranian-Brazilian interface, as well as [Iran's](#) growing multifaceted contacts with Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Guyana, among a host of other nations in the Americas, reflect Iran's commitment to assert itself as a player in its own right in the Americas.

Reports of Tehran's ties to Islamist militants allegedly operating in the region and their sympathizers within the region's Middle East diaspora and local Muslim communities continue to dominate the treatment of Iran's inroads into the Americas in media and foreign policy circles.

Not surprisingly, many followers of Middle East and Latin American and Caribbean affairs continue to view Iran's foray into the Americas through a security prism. Iran's track record of exporting its revolutionary Islamism throughout the greater Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s, argue many observers, including its support for Islamist militants opposed to the US-led status quo in the region, and Iran's support in Lebanon of Hezbollah, which is implicated in attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina in the 1990s, should to serve as the template on which to assess Tehran's intentions in the Americas.

The fact that Iran has reached out to vocal opponents of the United States in the region, namely Venezuela, Cuba, among others, along with traditionally close allies of Washington, has also raised alarm bells. Based on this view, Iran's expanding presence in the Americas constitutes a direct threat to US and regional security, a recurring theme in official US policy circles.

United States Defense Secretary Robert Gates voiced concern over what he described as Iran's "subversive activity" in the region during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 27, 2009. Prior to embarking on her February 28 to March 5, 2010, [tour](#) of regional capitals, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton opined before the Senate Appropriations Foreign Operations Sub-committee that Iran would be "at the top" of her agenda during her trip.

An April 2010 report by the US Department of Defense also stated that members of the Quds Force (Jerusalem), an elite special operations unit within Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), are also present in the Americas, especially in Venezuela.

The argument that Iran's growing presence in the Americas constitutes a security threat, however, fails to acknowledge the pragmatism guiding Iran's activities in the region, not to mention the open arms in which Tehran is being received.

The flurry of high-level bilateral meetings between Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and his counterparts in places such as Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia in recent years, with reciprocal visits by regional leaders to Tehran that culminated in a range of political, economic, energy, cultural, military and scientific agreements, are a case in point.

In addition, diplomatic exchanges and growing business contacts between Iran and partners in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, [Peru](#) and Mexico, coupled with the opening of new Iranian embassies, also illustrate the rapid development of the Islamic Republic's relations with the region.

Data issued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2009 and analyzed by the Latin Business Chronicle concluded that the volume of trade between Iran and the wider region topped an estimated US\$2.9 billion, approximately triple the trade volume between 2007 and 2008; Brazilian trade with Iran came in at \$1.3 billion during the same period, a dramatic 88% increase from 2007.

Brazil is Iran's largest source of exports from Latin America. The Iranian Red Crescent Society also dispatched tons of disaster relief aid and a team of doctors following the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12 this year. Iran has also promised hundreds of millions in economic aid and low-interest loans to Nicaragua, Bolivia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Forward defense diplomacy

Myriad factors drive Iran's strategy in the Americas. As a country that continues to be subject to a sustained US-led campaign to isolate it in the international arena, Iran has made it a strategic priority to cultivate a wide network of bilateral relations to undermine attempts to box it in.

Iran has also worked diligently to shore up its diplomatic clout in the face of threats of attack by the United States and, in particular, Israel, over its nuclear program. In this context, Iran's strategy to expand its ties to the Americas serves two main purposes: first, it allows Iran to better insulate itself and critical sectors of its society - especially its economy - from an increasingly rigid sanctions regime, thereby allowing it to weather US pressure to change its behavior; second, by cultivating a diverse network of relationships, including relations predicated on lucrative business dealings and delicate diplomacy with governments that have fallen out of favor with Washington, Iran works to ensure that as many of countries as possible have a vested interest in continued dealings with Iran.

This aspect of Iran's strategy enables it to count on the support of countries that would

previously have had no direct stake in whether Iran is placed under sanctions. A policy of diplomatic diversification, in essence, guides Iran's approach to the Americas.

The heavy US military presence in the greater Middle East has also profoundly shaped Tehran's strategic calculus when it comes to its strategy toward the Americas. The existence of a US-led alliance network composed of a nuclear-armed Israel and pro-US Arab regimes has left Iran, for all intents and purposes, hemmed in and potentially vulnerable to attack.

Iran's eastern and western frontiers, for instance, are flanked by tens of thousands of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively, as well as a growing US military footprint in neighboring Pakistan.

The regional landscape is also dotted by US military bases and a robust deployment of naval forces in the Gulf. United States security guarantees for Iran's neighbors add another level of anxiety in Tehran. United States strategy toward Iran is designed to contain and ultimately undermine Iranian influence through a policy of strategic encirclement.

With this in mind, Iran's inroads into the Americas represent a form of forward defense diplomacy, essentially a means through which the Islamic Republic can counter the United States by effectively employing soft power in a region considered by Washington to be in its own exclusive sphere of influence.

Return of revolution

Iran's push into the Americas would have never have materialized without the active encouragement of eager partners in the region. Yet how did the Islamic Republic manage to win so much goodwill from the Caribbean to the Southern Cone?

Iran's diplomatic achievements cannot be understood without taking into account the tectonic shift to the left that saw an eclectic mix of leftist populists of various stripes take over the reins of power throughout the hemisphere beginning in the late 1990s. United in their skepticism toward US foreign policy and eagerness to [charter](#) independent paths for their countries away from the neo-liberal economic orthodoxies preached by Washington, the rise of a new revolutionary politics determined to defy the US-led status quo in the region has provided Iran with a receptive audience for its overtures and an ample supply of friends.

A new form of revolutionary politics in the Americas imbued with an anti-imperialist discourse directed toward the United States has meshed well with Iranian foreign policy. Despite the Shi'ite Islamist character of the clerical regime, Tehran has adopted a realistic approach in its diplomacy toward the Americas that emphasizes anti-imperialism, popular struggle, social justice and the preservation of national independence and sovereignty through South-South solidarity.

Iran has also effectively used institutions such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to make inroads among NAM members in Latin America. The overlap between the revolutionary discourse out of Tehran and regional capitals such as Brasilia, Caracas, La Paz, Havana, Managua and Quito, for instance, is remarkable, thus providing Iran with valuable diplomatic cover on a range of issues, especially its nuclear program.

Iran has honed its skills as a source of resistance in the Middle East, where it is joined by Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas in Gaza (and occasionally Turkey and Qatar) in a front of resistance against US allies Israel and the bloc of pro-US Arab regimes led by Saudi Arabia and [Egypt](#). Iran is comfortable in this role.

The overextension of US forces and diplomatic resources to the greater Middle East and East Asia and the emphasis on counter-terrorism in recent years has also relegated Latin America to the proverbial sidelines in terms of foreign policy and security priorities in Washington, thus providing Iran, along with other players such as China and Russia, with ample room to maneuver. This confluence of circumstances is sure to encourage greater contacts between Iran and Latin America in the coming years