By Mary O'Grady

In the years after a brutal 10-year Soviet occupation, Afghanistan became a petri dish in which a culture of organized crime, radical politics and religious fundamentalism festered—and where Osama bin Laden set up operations.

Now something similar may be happening in Bolivia. The government is an advocate for coca growers. The Iranian presence is increasing. And reports from the ground suggest that African extremists are joining the fray.

Bolivian President Evo Morales, who is also the elected president of the coca producers' confederation, and Vice President Alvaro García Linera, formerly of the Maoist Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army, began building their repressive narco-state when they took office in 2006.

Step one was creating a culture of fear. Scores of intellectuals, technocrats and former government officials were harassed. Many fled.

Seventy-five-year-old José Maria Bakovic, a former World Bank infrastructure specialist, was targeted but refused to yield. As president of the highway commission from 2001-06, he had developed a bidding system for road construction to reduce corruption. This stymied Mr. Morales. Bakovic was twice imprisoned and appeared in court more than 250 times for alleged administrative crimes, according to people familiar with his case. Nothing was ever proven.

In early October, prosecutors summoned Bakovic to La Paz for another grilling. Cardiologists said the high altitude would kill him. The government overrode their objections, effectively issuing a death warrant. He went to La Paz on Oct. 11, had a heart attack and died the next day in Cochabamba.

With the opposition cowed, President Morales has turned Bolivia into an international hub of organized crime and a safe haven for terrorists. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has been expelled. United Nations data show that cocaine production is up in Bolivia since 2006 and unconfirmed reports say that Mexican, Russian and Colombian toughs are showing up to get a piece of the action. So are militants looking to raise cash and operate in the Western Hemisphere.

The Tehran connection is no secret. Iran is a nonvoting member of the "Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas" (ALBA). Its voting members are Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

In testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security in July, global security specialist Joseph Humire described Iran's interest in ALBA: "Iran understood that the wave of authoritarian populism known as '21st Century Socialism' that was sweeping through the region offered the Islamic Republic a permissive environment to carry out its global agenda against the West." Bolivia is fertile ground.

Iran may have put up some or all of the money to build a new ALBA military training facility outside of Santa Cruz. According to Mr. Humire, the Iranian Embassy in La Paz is "reported to contain at least 145 registered Iranian officials." There is also Bolivian support for radical Islamic converts like the Argentine Santiago Paz Bullrich, a disciple of Iranian cleric Mohsen Rabbani and the co-founder of the first Shia Islamic association in La Paz.

Iran may be using its Bolivian network to smuggle strategic minerals like tantalum (used to coat missiles), Mr. Humire told Congress. It may even be smuggling people. Unconfirmed but credible reports describe high officials ordering the issuance of I.D. cards and passports to numerous young, fit "turks"—a slang term in South America for Middle Easterners. One witness told a Bolivian source of mine (who asked to remain anonymous for reasons of safety) that the foreigners were Iranians but not diplomats.

In late September, according to the Bolivian daily La Razón, Bolivia's prospective consul to Lebanon was detained by Bolivian officials for allegedly trying to smuggle 392 kilos of cocaine to Ghana.

Thanks to steady cocaine demand, the Bolivian economy is awash in cash. Africa lies on the major transit route for European-bound cocaine. That may explain the increased sightings of Somalis, Ethiopians and South Africans in Santa Cruz, an unlikely place for African migration. In April, the partially burned body of a mutilated black man was found near the Brazilian border, suggesting a drug deal gone bad. An unusual marking was carved on the victim's right thigh, as if villains wanted to be sure to get credit for the brutality.

Within days the Spanish daily ABC reported on a Spaniard, also tortured with a carving on his leg, found in the same area. I learned from a source who did not want to be identified that the victim allegedly told police that the black man who had died was his friend and was African. According to my source, a witness said the dying man also murmured the words "al-Shabaab," the name of the Somali terrorist group.

One Bolivian I know claims that at Mr. Morales's 2006 inauguration he saw Mohamed Abdelaziz, secretary general of the separatist Polisario Front, which has carried on a long conflict with Morocco.

North Africa is becoming a hotbed of violence. There are rumors of insurgent and terrorist alliances. If Mr. Abdelaziz was indeed in La Paz, it raises further questions about Bolivia’s foreign policy.