*Disclaimer: The VRIC Monitor does source a limited amount of media reports from state-owned or -controlled media outlets from VRIC nations. These media reports are carefully selected and solely intended to report on cultural, diplomatic, economic, or military activities that are not reported on by other media and relevant for understanding VRIC influence in the region. Given the inevitability that state propaganda will be mixed into these articles, we ensure that reporting from state-media outlets is no more than 20 percent of the overall VRIC Monitor and exclude any opinion pieces or anti-US (anti-West) declarations of any kind.*

# OVERVIEW

The contested U.S. election has left a short-term vacuum for the VRIC to advance its interests in the Americas. The weekend after the U.S. election, representatives from VRIC nations arrived in La Paz for the inauguration of President Luis Arce of Bolivia. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohamad Javad Zarif capitalized on the opportunity to hold bilateral talks in Bolivia with his Chilean and Nicaraguan counterparts. The Russian ambassador in La Paz, Vladimir Sprinchan, visited the new Bolivian head of state, as President Arce stressed, in an interview with Russian state media, the need to restart nuclear cooperation.

Already, Arce has stated that Bolivia is restoring ties with Cuba and Venezuela, and will deepen Bolivia's relationship with Iran. Certain key cabinet members in the new Arce administration suggest that the new MAS government will be closely aligned with the Islamic Republic and Venezuela's Maduro regime. The return of Evo Morales, settled into the coca-growing region of Chapare, assures that Bolivia is back in the fold of the Bolivarian Network.

The resurgence of the Bolivarian Network is being felt in neighboring countries, as well. In Chile, the creation of a new constituent assembly threatens the most developed country in South America and the ongoing political crisis in Peru poses an opportunity for an extremist to rise to power in next year's elections. The momentum of leftist, socialist movements in South America has prompted Argentine President Alberto Fernandez to call for a revival of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a defunct regional bloc established in 2008. One of the lesser-known mechanisms within UNASUR is its Defense Council that promotes military exchange among its members. The recent Scientific-Military Commission launched by the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB) in Venezuela, with military advisors from Russia, Iran, and China, could be an impetus for potential VRIC arms transfers using Venezuela as a gateway to modernize the weapons systems of select South American nations.

Iran's interests in intensifying its military presence in Venezuela is evident, with several flights arriving in recent weeks from sanctioned Iranian airlines. The tri-nation tour in November of Foreign Minister Zarif, starting in Venezuela, continuing to Cuba, and ending in Bolivia, seems to shore up Iran's efforts to build a sanctions-resistance network in Latin America that will inevitably be used to shift its commercial exchange to arms transfers. While in Venezuela, Zarif defended Iran and Venezuela's military cooperation against U.S. maximum pressure and stressed the need to further cooperation in the defense sector.

The U.S. presidential election has distracted many in the media, however, the Trump administration remains focused on countering regional threats in Latin America. In late October, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien took a second trip to the region in three months to announce a $5 billion investment package in Brazil. This visit comes at a critical time, as China exerts its political and economic influence in the region, moving rapidly toward military dimensions. The Maduro regime now bears anti-ship missiles from China, as an Argentine firm has sent 10 satellites from Russia and China into orbit.

**MUST READS:**

- Joseph Humire: 'Iran, China, Russia and Cuba will advance in control of Ibero-America no matter what happens in the United States' by María Angélica Correa, *La Gaceta (content in Spanish)*
- Is Iran Sending Weapons to Venezuela? And How Is the U.S. Responding? By Emmanuele Ottolenghi, *The Dispatch*
- Special Report: Phantom oil buyers in Russia, advice from Iran help Venezuela skirt sanctions by Marianna Parraga, Rinat Sagdiev, Parisa Hafezi, *Reuters*
- The Interwoven Global Tanker Trade: The Venezuela Case Study by Arthur Richier, *Vortexa*
- The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela by Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernández, *CSIS Future of Venezuela Initiative*
- Iran's Overseas Propaganda: How Hezbollah Courted Argentina by Florencia Montaruli, *IranWire*
- FBI Renews Activity on Forgotten '94 Plane Bombing by Todd Bensman, *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*
- How Chile Handles This Contentious Moment Can Give America a Lesson by Anthony Kim, *Heritage Foundation*
- Dominion, the Foreign Software Company with a Controversial Background Deciding American Elections by Orlando Avendaño and Emmanuel Alejandro Rondón, *El American*
- China spending billions in Caribbean to woo typically American partners by Ryan

Morgan, *American Military News*

**TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ON VENEZUELA**

- COMMERCE: US Expands Military License Review Factors for National Security Controlled Items to PRC, Venezuela, and Russia
- JUSTICE: The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): Statement on Iranian Election Interference
- JUSTICE: Remarks of Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division John C. Demers on the Iran Forfeiture Actions
- JUSTICE: United States Files Complaint to Forfeit Iranian Missiles and Sells Previously-Transferred Iranian Petroleum
- TREASURY: Treasury Sanctions Nicaraguan Financial Institution and Officials Supporting Ortega Regime
- U.S. EMBASSY IN BRAZIL: U.S. National Security Advisor to travel to Brazil on October 19-20

The Bolivarian Network is resurging. Evo Morales returned to Bolivia on November 9th after President Luis Arce was inaugurated. Chilean social movements managed to bend the will of the Piñera government and overwhelmingly approved a referendum to rewrite its constitution. After many upheavals, Peru has a new president that has to deal with a profound political crisis and the pandemic.

In Bolivia, Evo Morales has returned to the coca-growing region of Chapare as the new MAS government sets to restore ties with like-minded governments, such as Venezuela and Iran. Immediately after Bolivia's election, and prior to his return, Evo Morales made a hasty visit to Venezuela as Iranian "technicians" arrived in Caracas and Nicolás Maduro announced a new scientific-military commission with VRIC advisors. Meanwhile in La Paz, President Luis Arce immediately restored relations with Iran and Venezuela receiving the diplomatic

credentials of ambassadors from the two countries, just three days after taking power.

In Peru, a political crisis is ongoing with three presidents in less than one week. After President Martin Vizcarra was impeached on November 9th on corruption allegations, the leader of the Peruvian Congress, Manuel Merino, took control of the country. Five days later, with many violent protests, Merino resigned alongside the majority of his cabinet. The Congress then voted to have lawmaker Francisco Sangati, of the Purple Party, become head of the legislature and by default the interim head of state. Destabilized by the pandemic that destroyed the economy and left many suffering, Peru is heading toward turbulent times as it moves towards elections in April 2021.

In Chile, a public referendum overwhelmingly passed in favor of changing their constitution. President Piñera agreed to the plebiscite- that took place on October 25th- after a month of protests in the country. The public also voted that a body of 155 citizens, to be named on April 11, 2021, will make up the new Constituent Assembly.

In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo regime becomes emboldened by recent laws to suppress opposition voices. The carbon copy of Russia's "foreign agents law" joins the "special cybercrimes law," set to punish Nicaraguan citizens for propagating "fake news" and, pending a second approval by the legislature, doles out life sentences for hate crimes. Human rights groups have decried these authoritarian measures in Nicaragua as ways to persecute political opponents.

As the Bolivarian network coalesces, their relationship with the VRIC strengthens. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohamad Javad Zarif toured the region last week, starting in Venezuela and ending in Bolivia. With help from the VRIC, Venezuela has started a scientific-military commission that creates the potential for future arms transfers. While the Maduro regime has denied purchasing missiles from Iran, stating their intent to manufacture their own weapons, an anti-blockade law and adoption of an alternative cryptocurrency system further set the stage for arms deals that evade U.S. sanctions. Despite Maduro's claim, Venezuela received a sanctioned Iranian airline carrying unknown cargo on Tuesday, October 26th.

- State media BelTA learned from the press service of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Belarus and Venezuela have reaffirmed their bilateral strategic partnership. – BelTA on 17-NOV
- Venezuelan central bank officials have summoned executives from a handful of local financial firms to discuss plans to create a clearing and settlement system in U.S. dollars starting next year. – Bloomberg on 16-NOV
- The United States is seeking to bring Venezuela to the UN Security Council because it

is possible to raise human rights violations in that forum said U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft. – Voice of America on 13-NOV

- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has arrived in Venezuela at the start of a Latin American tour that will also take him to Cuba and Bolivia. – Radio Free Europe on 04-NOV
- Oil production has fallen catastrophically to multi-decade lows, the extremely fragile economy continues to contract, and poorly maintained infrastructure keeps failing. Washington is turning the screws on Maduro's regime, imposing ever tighter sanctions aimed at isolating Caracas from economically crucial global energy and financial markets. – Oil Price on 03-NOV
- The prosecution of Venezuela's Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami for violating U.S. sanctions has run into another snag after a federal judge allowed one of his co-defendants to withdraw a guilty plea over allegations that U.S. attorneys withheld evidence in the case. – Associated Press on 02-NOV
- Venezuela says it will incorporate bitcoin and litecoin wallets to its Patria's Cryptocurrency Remittance Platform. Authorities in the country say this move will enable Venezuelan citizens to formally receive remittances in cryptocurrency form. Many citizens already use bitcoin as a store of value as well as for cross-border payments. – Bitcoin.com on 02-NOV
- A refinery in northern Venezuela suffered a blast yesterday, and Maduro has stated it was a terrorist attack with a "large and powerful weapon." An investigation into the attack has been launched. – Oil Price on 29-OCT
- A Venezuelan official warned that the Military Council announced by Maduro will set the continent's alarms before a terrifying force is consolidated. With the involvement of Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba, it completely violates everything related to state sovereignty. – Infobae on 28-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Venezuela's state-run oil company PDVSA began using a new location near La Borracha island in the Caribbean sea for transferring Venezuelan crude from one ship to another for exports. – Reuters on 27-OCT
- State media reports Maduro met with the representatives of the Superior General Staff of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) and the commanders of the eight Strategic Regions of Integral Defense (REDI) on the centenary of Venezuelan Aviation, the Military Council will be activated in full force with the support of Russia, China, and Cuba. – Ultimas Noticias on 23-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Maduro announced the creation of an international investment center with which he hopes to attract local and foreign capital to boost the national economy, today 90% smaller than in 2013. – iProfesional on 10-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Maduro is a step closer to wielding new authority that will enable him to circumvent

U.S. sanctions. The pro-regime National Constituent Assembly approved an anti-blockade law allowing Maduro to sign new oil deals with private firms and foreign nations without disclosing them publicly. – Voice of America on 09-OCT

- State media reports Maduro spoke at the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of Venezuela's Strategic Command Operations, stating that the country is planning to manufacture its own weapons and announcing that a special military and scientific council is being set up for that exact purpose. – Sputnik on 25-SEPT

**THE BOLIVARIAN NETWORK**

- Peru's political turmoil took a chaotic turn when interim leader Manuel Merino quit and Congress couldn't decide on his replacement. That left Peru rudderless and in crisis less than a week after legislators ignited a storm of protest by removing President Martín Vizcarra, an anti-corruption crusader highly popular among Peruvians. – Associated Press on 16-NOV
- Bolivia's new president, Luis Arce, has moved swiftly to restore ties with Iran and Venezuela, receiving the credentials of ambassadors from the two countries, just three days after his socialist party retook the reins of power. – Reuters on 11-NOV
- Nicaragua's parliament voted to amend the Central American country's constitution to allow life sentences for hate crimes despite criticism from human rights organizations who contend it will be used to target political opponents. – U.S. News on 10-NOV
- Former President Evo Morales returned to Bolivia following an election that returned his socialist party to power a year after he fled the nation amid a wave of protests. Hundreds of supporters accompanied him as he crossed into the town of Villazon, as well as Argentina's President Fernández, who came to bid him farewell. – Associated Press on 09-NOV
- Former Bolivian President Evo Morales, who is getting ready to return from Buenos Aires to his country a year after his departure, said with the historic triumph of his party in the elections in Bolivia, U.S. President Donald Trump "has no trophy for his elections." – Eju! on 30-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Before the inauguration of the elected president Luis Arce, the first conflict of the future government broke out. After the modification of 11 articles of the regulation of debates of the Chamber of Senators was approved – which changed the approval requirement by two thirds to an absolute majority – Carlos Mesa announced that his bench would not attend the inauguration on November 8th. – La Razón on 28-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Senator of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) party, Andrónico Rodríguez, has announced that on November 9th, one day after the president-elect of Bolivia, Luis

Arce, takes office, Evo Morales will land in the country. – Merco Press on 28-OCT (content in Spanish)

- Nicaragua's unicameral legislature approved legislation mandating prison sentences for those who use online platforms to spread false information or information that could raise alarm among people. – Associated Press on 27-OCT
- State media reports Bolivia's President-elect Luis Arce proposed to resume relations with Venezuela and Cuba, two countries that the Añez presidency had severed ties with. – TeleSUR on 26-OCT
- Evo Morales left Argentina bound for Venezuela. The former Bolivian president departed from Buenos Aires on an Embraer Lineage 1000 aircraft from Venezuelan state airline Conviasa, on an official flight ordered by the regime of Nicolás Maduro. – Infobae on 23-OCT (content in Spanish)
- State media reports Argentine President Alberto Fernández today called for recovering the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), as the most convenient for Latin America. – Prensa Latina on 21-OCT
- Protesters in Chile's capital torched two churches, looted stores, and clashed with police in a spasm of violence a week before a referendum on whether to ditch a dictatorship-era constitution. – Wall Street Journal on 19-OCT
- The arrest of Mexico's former defense minister by U.S. authorities shows that corruption is Mexico's biggest problem, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said. – Wall Street Journal on 16-OCT
- Gustavo Porras, a Sandinista loyalist and president of Nicaragua's National Assembly, announced the upcoming discussion of two new repressive laws. The Assembly will take up the "Law for the Regulation of Foreign Agents" on October 13th. The "Special Cybercrimes Law" will be introduced the same day. Both laws are expected to be approved rapidly by the full parliament. – El Confidencial on 04-OCT

The return of a key ally in Bolivia, along with renewed momentum for leftist governments to

return to power in Chile and Peru, provide Iran with fertile ground to strengthen its presence in Latin America. At a time when Tehran is looking to legitimize its arms trade after the lifting of the UN arms embargo last month.

Seizing the moment, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif took a three-country tour of Latin America to shore up Tehran's alliances. The trip began on November 4th in Venezuela where Zarif held high-level meetings with the Maduro regime to discuss impending defense cooperation. Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza denied claims that the Maduro regime has purchased long-range missiles from Iran but alluded to potential arms trade in the future. Concurrent to Zarif's trip, an Iranian sanctioned airline Fars Air Qeshm arrived in Caracas on November 7th with undisclosed cargo. Subsequently, the same Iranian airline, Fars Air Qeshm, returned to Caracas on November 13th with what seems to be materials for unmanned aerial vehicles, according to local sources.

Zarif then stopped in Havana on November 6th, where he met with his counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez, the vice president of Cuba's council of ministers, Ricardo Cabrisas, and held a video conference with Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel. The two countries agreed to collaborate on energy, nanotechnology, and biotechnology, and marked an alliance against U.S. sanctions. Zarif also visited two medical research centers to get briefed on the advancement of various COVID-19 vaccines, as well as Cuba's cooperation with the Pasteur Institute of Iran.

Zarif finished his Latin American tour in La Paz on November 8th, attending the inauguration of President Luis Arce in Bolivia. On the sidelines of the inauguration, Zarif met with his counterparts in Chile and had a call with the Nicaraguan foreign minister. Under Evo Morales, Bolivia was a key strategic partner of Iran and now that the MAS is back in power, Iran is keen to gain lost ground in the Andean country.

While Iran's top diplomat embarked on his trip, its chief terror proxy, Hezbollah, was also on the move in South America. On October 22nd, an accused Hezbollah operative, Mohamad Ghaleb Hamdar, was released from a Peruvian prison after serving his initial sentence for immigration fraud. Still facing criminal charges for terrorism by Peru's highest court, Hamdar was ordered to stay in the country while his trial resumes. Despite efforts by Peruvian prosecutors to order house arrest, the court imposed limited travel and residence restrictions on Hamdar who was accused of having nitroglycerine on his person and apartment back in 2014.

Meanwhile, a tip received by the Argentine embassy in the United Kingdom alerted local officials of a November 12th shipment of ammonium nitrate across Argentina's northern

border from Paraguay. This is the same explosive used in the 1994 AMIA attack in Buenos Aires and the chemical compound that caused the massive explosion in Beirut, Lebanon earlier this year. The case is currently being investigated by Argentine authorities.

- At least 18 oil tankers are expected to load oil for export from Venezuela in the coming weeks, according to tracking data and internal documents from state-run PDVSA, in a sign the sanctioned OPEC nation's crude exports may rebound this month. – Reuters on 11-NOV
- Visa-free access and direct flights are the two important advantages for Iran and Venezuela to develop tourism cooperation, the Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan said. – Tehran Times on 10-NOV
- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had a meeting with his Chilean counterpart Andrés Allamand Zavala in Bolivia's capital of La Paz. During the meeting, which took place outside Bolivia's president-elect's inauguration ceremony, the two main diplomats discussed bilateral relations and other issues of mutual interest. – Nuevo Periodico on 08-NOV (content in Spanish)
- State media reports while in Bolivia, Mohammad Javad Zarif held a telephone conversation with his counterpart Denis Moncada. In this conversation, Zarif emphasized the friendly relations between the two countries and expressed hope that he would visit Nicaragua in the near future. – Mehr News on 08-NOV
- State media reports Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif arrived in Bolivia to discuss ways to boost ties with the Latin American country. The Iranian minister congratulated Arce on his election and pointed to the need to enhance and strengthen cooperation between the two states. – Mehr News on 08-NOV
- Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, with his delegation, arrived Saturday, November 8th, at El Alto International Airport to participate in the inauguration of President-elect Luis Arce. – Bolivia's Ministry of the Presidency on 07-NOV (content in Spanish)
- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has announced that his country's military cooperation with Venezuela will continue and will not surrender to U.S. pressure. – Middle East Monitor on 07-NOV
- State media reports Iranian Foreign Minister says Iran and Venezuela have stood against U.S. "bullying" and are entitled to have defense cooperation. "It is totally legitimate for Iran and Venezuela to have defense cooperation," Zarif told Telesur when asked about U.S. threats over Iran and Venezuela's cooperation in the defense field. – Mehr News on 07-NOV
- Foreign Minister Mohamad Javad Zarif, who is on a three-nation Latin American tour, met high-ranking Cuban officials in Havana. In talks with Cuban Foreign Minister

Bruno Rodriguez, the two sides agreed to improve bilateral cooperation in political and economic spheres as well as in energy, nanotech, and biotech sectors. – Financial Tribune on 07-NOV

- State media reports Zarif, who traveled to Caracas for a three-leg tour of Latin America, held a meeting with Maduro. The top Iranian diplomat had already held a meeting with Delcy Rodriguez for talks on various topics about bilateral relations and other issues of mutual interest. – ABNA 24 on 06-NOV
- State media reports Venezuela has no immediate plans to buy Iranian missiles, says Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, but Venezuela reserves the right to do so when deemed necessary. Arreaza stated this at a meeting with his Iranian counterpart. – ANI on 06-NOV
- State media reports Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Delcy Rodriguez discussed issues of mutual interest in Caracas, Zarif earlier that day held a joint meeting with his Venezuelan counterpart Jorge Arreaza. During the meeting, Zarif offered his views on Iran and Venezuela's roles in defending the new emerging world. – IRNA on 05-NOV
- The Venezuelan government declared that air restrictions would remain in effect due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the exception of authorizing flights from and to Turkey, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Iran. – Airways Mag on 03-NOV
- The United States revealed it had seized Iranian missiles shipped to Yemen and sold 1.1 million barrels of previously seized Iranian oil that was bound for Venezuela, in the Trump administration's latest move to increase pressure on Tehran less than a week before the November 3rd election. – Reuters on 29-OCT
- Following Bolivia's election results last week, which saw the Movement to Socialism (MAS) party receiving 55 percent of the votes and overall majorities in both houses of Congress, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has voiced Tehran's support for the new Bolivian government and welcomed its "return to democracy". – Middle East Monitor on 27-OCT
- An Iranian plane owned by a company sanctioned by the United States for allegedly shipping weapons to Syria landed in Venezuela on Tuesday, October 26th, according to an opposition Venezuelan lawmaker and flight tracking data. The EP-FAB 747 aircraft, owned by Iran's Qeshm Fars Air, landed at a time when trade ties have grown closer between the two OPEC members, whose oil industries are under increasingly strict U.S. sanctions. It was not immediately clear what the plane brought to Venezuela. – Reuters on 27-OCT
- The United States is warning it will destroy potential Iranian long-range missile shipments delivered to the Maduro regime in Venezuela. – Fox News on 26-OCT
- State media reports Vice-Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Legal and Judicial

Commission Hassan Norouzi announced the ratification of the extradition bill between Iran and Russia, as well as the approval of the legal agreement on civil affairs between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Brazil. – IRNA on 20-OCT

- State media reports Iran's outgoing Ambassador to Mexico City Mohammad Taqi Hosseini said that the relations of the two states are going to bolster in the future. – IRNA on 13-OCT
- State media reports Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan exchanged views with Venezuelan Minister for Tourism and Foreign Trade, Felix Plasencia, in a video conference, reaching an agreement to sign a memorandum of understanding in a bid to broaden bilateral ties. – Tehran Times on 09-OCT
- The former Chief-Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, says Iran is helping Venezuela to form a mobilization force. Safavi says that the process is "transferring Iran's experience" during its eight-year war with Iraq between 1980-88 to countries like Venezuela that are "standing against the US." – Radio Farda on 28-SEPT

**HEZBOLLAH**

- Argentina said that it had increased security on its border with Paraguay due to an "anonymous tip" to authorities that was passed on via its embassy in the United Kingdom. There was a possibility of "bomb-making materials entering across Argentina's northern border." – The Jerusalem Post on 16-NOV
- An anonymous notice received at the Argentine embassy in the United Kingdom triggered an investigation into the potential attempt to enter through the northern border a shipment of ammonium nitrate, an element that can be used for the manufacture of explosives. – La Nación on 15-NOV (content in Spanish)
- Hezbollah was declared a terrorist organization in Guatemala on October 12th, joining Argentina, Colombia, Honduras and Paraguay, to become the fifth country in Latin America since July 2019 that makes this declaration in the fight against the advancement of transnational criminal groups in the region. – Dialogo on 06-NOV (content in Spanish)
- The U.S. is preparing to sanction former Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil for assisting his key ally, the pro-Iranian political movement Hezbollah, said a U.S. official and another person briefed on the plan. The move is likely to upend attempts to form a new cabinet in crisis-ridden Lebanon. – Wall Street Journal on 05-NOV
- The Lebanese terrorist, Muhammad Ghaleb Hamdar, detained in October 2014 by the National Police after being accused as the one sent by the terrorist group Hezbollah to

Peru, will be released by the justice Tuesday, October 27th due to excessive prison time. – Exitosa on 25-OCT (content in Spanish)

- Guatemala designated all branches of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, according to the Foreign Ministry. This makes Guatemala the eighth country to designate Hezbollah a terrorist organization in 2020. – Jerusalem Post on 23-OCT

**THE NISMAN/AMIA CASE**

- Federal judge Marcelo Martínez De Giorgi issued the dismissal of the former head of Interpol Ronald Noble in the Memorandum case with Iran. This case was born from prosecutor Alberto Nisman's work and accuses Vice President Cristina Kirchner of covering up the investigation of the attack on the AMIA. – Infobae on 14-OCT (content in Spanish)

**QATAR**

- State media reports Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani met with the ambassador of Argentina Carlos Alberto Hernandez at the Amiri Diwan Office on the occasion of the end of his tenure in the country. – Gulf Times on 07-OCT

Russia's long-standing military ties with the Maduro regime may work with Iran to modernize Venezuela's weapons systems. A new strategic scientific-military commission in Venezuela lays the groundwork for future arms shipments from VRIC nations. If Syria is a precedent, then the Russian Navy could be gearing up to assist Iranian vessels to send future arms shipments to Venezuela as it recently did in Tartus, Syria. Reuters has reported that Russia is already assisting Iran-Venezuela fuel transfers through phantom companies and other sanctions-evasion techniques. Other unconfirmed media reports suggest that "unknown parties," operating under the guise of Russian companies, are recruiting mercenaries in Syria to travel to Venezuela.

As Russia embeds deeper into Maduro's military industry, Moscow is also slated to provide political support as observers to Venezuela's sham parliamentary elections in December. On November 12th, Venezuela's Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, and PDVSA Chief Executive Asdrubal Chávez arrived in Russia to "deepen strategic alliances."

Venezuela is also helping legitimize Russia's COVID-19 vaccine. This month, clinical trials began in Venezuela and Argentina after accepting a shipment of the Russian vaccine, which is also being shipped to Mexico and Brazil. The recent election of Russia, China, Cuba, and Bolivia to the United Nations Human Rights Council provides another avenue for the VRIC to legitimize its presence in Latin America.

- Venezuelan official Delcy Rodriguez and the head of the South American country's state oil company, PDVSA, arrived in Russia to "deepen strategic alliances," Venezuela's information ministry said. – Reuters on 12-NOV
- On August 21st, a tanker called the *Otoman* docked at the Jose oil terminal on Venezuela's coast, yet no tanker with that name is registered in major global shipping databases. Since the U.S. imposed sanctions on Venezuela, PDVSA and some shipping agencies have been ignoring protocols for checking tanker identity. This is part of a smokescreen that Tehran has helped develop so Venezuela's oil exports can continue. – Reuters 10-NOV
- Nicaragua opened a consulate in Simferopol, Crimea in the presence of Nicaragua's Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Alba Azucena Torres. Nicaragua recognized Crimea as part of Russia in 2014. – Saxon on 09-NOV
- Several reports have emerged over "unknown parties," which operate under the guise of Russian companies, recruiting Syrians to fight for Russian forces. The companies are active in regions controlled by the Syrian regime. Significantly, these groups are recruiting Syrians to travel to Venezuela, after initially being limited to Libya. – Asharq Al-Awsat on 08-NOV
- Argentina agrees to buy 25 million doses of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine. President Fernández revealed in an interview with a Russian news agency that the government will receive initial 10 million doses of Sputnik V vaccine by as early as December, should it clear clinical trials. – Buenos Aires Times on 03-NOV
- Venezuela has invited Russian observers to attend parliamentary elections in December, Russian Ambassador in Caracas Sergey Melik-Bagdasarov said. – UrduPoint on 30-OCT
- State media reports Bolivia will restore its relations with Russia after the decline during the previous government, which came to power as a result of a coup, new President Luis Arce said in an interview with Sputnik. – Sputnik on 26-OCT

- Last week, the Iranian-flagged oil tanker Samah entered the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal. After a few miles, the 900-foot-long ship stopped reporting its position and destination. Evidence suggests the ship sailed to Syria, escorted by two Russian Navy ships, including a destroyer. – USNI News on 21-OCT
- State media reports Maduro says thousands of doses of a coronavirus treatment, Favipiravir, have arrived from Russia. According to Maduro, the coronavirus treatment will be available to Venezuelans for free. – Sputnik on 18-OCT
- State media reports Venezuelan authorities have selected volunteers to take part in clinical trials of the Russian coronavirus vaccine dubbed Sputnik V, the trials are underway. – TASS on 15-OCT
- The Vektor Scientific Center for Virology and Biotechnology, in Russia, patented a vaccine against the coronavirus. This is the second Russian vaccine that the European country registers to stop the spread of the pandemic. – El Popular on 09-OCT (content in Spanish)
- Twitter announced it has taken action against 1,594 accounts it said were linked to five separate state disinformation networks in Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, and Thailand. – American Military News on 09-OCT
- As part of the world space week that is held from October 4-10, the first Central American and Caribbean course, “Ask a Russian cosmonaut,” was held virtually. This course was aimed at primary-level boys and girls in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay. – Tn8 on 07-OCT (content in Spanish)
- State media reports Russia will invest almost 100 million dollars in Nicaragua in renewable energy. The announcement was made to the press by the Russian ambassador in Managua, Igor Kondrashev, who confirmed the upcoming arrival to the country of 450 new buses and the donation of two helicopters for humanitarian operations. – La Voz del Sandinismo on 24-SEPT

In November, China claimed to have found the coronavirus in meat shipments from Brazil and Ecuador, dealing a blow to these countries' already pandemic-weary economies. Curiously, both Brazil and Ecuador have been openly critical of China, especially as Ecuador suffers from China's aggressive illegal fishing. China has been illegally fishing off the coast of many Latin American countries, potentially testing territorial waters in the pacific.

China has also taken to the sky, as the launch site and partial funder for 10 satellites that were sent into orbit by Argentine company Satellogic. Since its inception, Satellogic has launched 21 satellites from China, Russia, and French Guinea. The firm, with a portion of its funding and launch capabilities backed by China, is opening geospatial intelligence doors for China in the Western Hemisphere.

China's support of the Maduro regime is nothing new. In recent propaganda videos, it seems Venezuelan warships have been armed with new Chinese-made C-802A anti-ship missiles. China also has been collaborating with Maduro's allies, Cuba and Russia, on Venezuela's scientific-military commission. As the rest of the VRIC members focus on Chile, Chinese company State Grid International Development Limited bought out Chile's largest distributor of energy.

In light of China's aggression in the region, U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien traveled to Brazil on October 19-20 to announce a major U.S. investment package, in an effort to ward off China's influence from the critical ally.

- The Spanish company Naturgy agreed to sell its stake in Chile's largest distributor of energy, Compañía General de Electricidad (CGE), to the Chinese company State Grid International Development Limited for more than $3 billion. – Cooperativa on 13-NOV (content in Spanish)
- In early September, the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine trials were put on temporary hold across all international testing sites due to a volunteer developing an unexplained illness and died. Similarly, Anvisa, Brazil's National Health Surveillance Agency, just recently suspended Sinovac's phase three clinical trials after a volunteer experienced a severe adverse event (SAE). – Science Times on 10-NOV
- China has offered Jamaica loans and expertise to build miles of new highways. Throughout the Caribbean, it has donated security equipment to military and police forces, and built a network of Chinese cultural centers. And it has dispatched large shipments of test kits, masks and ventilators to help governments respond to the pandemic. The initiatives are part of a quiet but assertive push by China in recent years to expand its footprint and influence in the region through government grants and loans, investments by Chinese companies, and diplomatic, cultural and security

efforts. – New York Times on 08-NOV

- China successfully sent 13 satellites, including 10 from Argentina, into orbit in what was stated to be the biggest launch of foreign satellites by the country that could fetch hundreds of millions of dollars to the communist nation. – Tech Genyz on 06-NOV
- China has again detected coronavirus in the packaging of frozen fish from Ecuador and in that of frozen pork meat imported from Brazil, local media reported. In a statement, the Ministry of Production of Ecuador ratified compliance with biosafety protocols in its export products. – El Comercio on 01-NOV (content in Spanish)
- State media reports Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message to Luis Arce for his victory in Bolivia's presidential election. Noting in his message that the two countries are good friends and partners, Xi hailed the great practical achievements made since the establishment of the strategic partnership between the two sides in 2018. – CGTN on 26-OCT
- State media reports at a meeting held at the headquarters of the Ministry of Communications (MINCOM), in Havana, the president of Cuba's Post Office, Carlos Asencio, and China's ambassador, Chen Xi, discussed investment projects to be developed by Chinese companies to improve postal shipping processes. – Prensa Latina on 23-OCT
- Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro said the federal government will not buy a COVID-19 vaccine from China's Sinovac, one day after the health minister said it would be included in the nation's immunization program. – Reuters on 21-OCT
- Last month, the Venezuelan regime under Nicolás Maduro released propaganda videos that suggest its warships have been armed with new Chinese-made C-802A anti-ship missiles, which could target enemy vessels from over 100 nautical miles away. – The National Interest on 21-OCT
- Venezuela's propaganda videos are showing off warships armed with new Chinese-made anti-ship missiles. The C-802A missile, supplied by Beijing to the Venezuelan Navy, is designed to take out surface ships at extended ranges. – US Naval Institute on 16-OCT
- "China out" was one of the slogans heard on Argentine streets during the eighth popular march against the Kirchnerist government that took office last December. – Asia News on 14-OCT
- Argentina's third Confucius Institute officially opened its doors at the National University of Cordoba (UNC), offering introductory to advanced courses on Chinese language and culture at the country's oldest institute of higher education. – Mercopress on 13-OCT
- Chile has been granted permission to open a consulate general in the southwest China city of Chengdu, making it the first Latin American country to do so, the Sichuan

provincial government said. – South China Morning Post on 11-OCT
- Many Latin American countries have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, including Panama. As Mexico considers whether to join, some countries in the region face pressure from the Trump administration not to get too close to China. – The World on 06-OCT

**ILLEGAL FISHING**

- A new report suggests the Chinese fishing fleet that mass trawled just off Ecuador's Galápagos Islands in recent months was fishing illegally in the country's territorial waters, sparking a renewed search for regional solutions to reel in such illegal fishing practices. – InSight Crime on 05-NOV
- A fleet of Chinese-owned fishing vessels crowded along the edge of Ecuador's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near the Galápagos Islands between June and September, prompting international concern that they would illegally fish in Ecuador's territorial waters. – Mongabay on 09-OCT

**VRIC MEDICAL DIPLOMACY**

- State media reports the monoclonal antibody Itolizumab received authorization to start a phase III clinical trial in COVID-19 patients in the U.S., Mexico, and Brazil, reported Cuba's Center for Molecular Immunology (CIM). – Prensa Latina on 04-NOV
- Argentina could obtain 25 million doses of the Russian COVID-19 vaccine "Sputnik V" between December 2020 and January 2021, President Alberto Fernández said. – China People's Daily on 03-NOV
- Brazil's health regulator authorized the import of a Chinese-produced vaccine after claims from President Jair Bolsonaro that the country lacked the credibility to develop a cure for the coronavirus. – Bloomberg on 23-OCT
- State media reports the Embassy of the State of Qatar to the Republic of El Salvador handed over the first batch of medical aid, equipment and supplies provided by Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) to El Salvador to support it facing the global health emergency and confronting the coronavirus pandemic. – Gulf Times on 07-OCT