



IRAN'S ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

November & December 2021

The following is a summary of open-source media reporting on Iran's presence and activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in November & December 2021. This is not a complete list of media reports on Iran's activities in Latin America but are some of the most relevant articles and reports selected by SFS researchers and fellows. The monitor does source a limited amount of media reports from state-owned or -controlled media outlets, which are carefully selected and solely intended to report on news that is not reported on by other media and is relevant for understanding VRIC influence in the region. This report is produced as part of our VRIC Monitor published monthly by the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS), a non-profit, national security think tank based in Washington D.C.



- State media reports in a meeting, the chairman of the Iranian Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour and the

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Co-Director General of Nicaragua's Culture Institute Enrique Morales Alonso signed a 5-year MoU on cultural and artistic cooperation between the two countries. - [Mehr News on 05-JAN](#)

- State media reports Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi warned of Iran's revenge for the U.S. assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in case those involved in and behind the "criminal act" are not prosecuted through a just mechanism. - [TeleSUR on 03-JAN](#)
- A new report by an Israel-based defense think tank claims that Iran has supplied Venezuela with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that can reach Miami. The Alma Research and Education Center report said the UAVs can gather intelligence and strike surface or air targets, including by "conducting a suicide explosive attack." Sharing them with Venezuela, an anti-American ally about 2,000 kilometers from Miami, may be intended to make America "think twice" before any military action against Iran. - [Just The News on 31-DEC](#)
- Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are stationed in Venezuela, on the northeast tip of South America, where some 2,000 kilometers (1,243 miles) separate them "from skyscrapers in Miami," the author of a new report on the threat of UAVs has told JNS. Maj. (res.) Tal Beerli, head of the research department at the Alma Center, a defense watchdog located in northern Israel, said the new report highlighted a topic that until now has received little attention — the arrival of Iranian-made UAVs in the western hemisphere. - [Jewish News Syndicate on 29-DEC](#)
- Iran fired missiles in a provocation toward Israel and invited Venezuela's socialist leader for a visit as it continued to antagonize the West in the midst of slow-moving negotiations to stop Tehran's nuclear program. Venezuela's Maduro revealed he was invited by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to visit Tehran soon to finalize new cooperation agreements with Iran. - [Just The News on 27-DEC](#)
- Iran traded 1.16 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$733.32 million with Latin American countries during the current fiscal year's first eight months (March 21-Nov. 21), latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration show. Trade with Brazil stood at 928,2280 tons worth \$404.86 million, for the Latin American country to top the list of Iran's partners in the region. It was followed by Argentina with 207,073 tons worth \$287.15 million, Venezuela with 17,426 tons worth \$32.53 million, Mexico with 569 tons worth \$2.31 million and Ecuador with 2,481 tons worth \$1.78 million. - [Financial Tribune on 25-DEC](#)
- The Government of Venezuela and the Republic of Iran pledged to strengthen "the defense of multilateralism" during a meeting between the Venezuelan minister, Félix Plasencia, and the director general for the Americas of the Foreign Ministry of Iran, Ambassador Nazar Aharai. - [Swiss Info on 23-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- Infobae had access to documents leaked by Caribbean oil officials that show how the Venezuelan and Iranian regimes "resuscitate" ships to evade the sanctions imposed by the US Treasury Department that weigh on their administrations and thus increase their deals. That would be one of the mechanisms used to manage to commercialize its main raw material below the radars. But a detailed analysis of the vessels that entered the ports of Nicolás Maduro controlled by PDVSA raised the alarms that allowed the true destination of the S-TINOS to be traced to the depths of the Gulf of Bengal. - [Infobae on 14-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- State media reports the chancellor of Maragheh University Mohammadali Lotfollahi announced that the university signed an educational and research memorandum with the University of Queretaro in Santiago, Mexico to expand international cooperation. The professors and students of the two universities would be able to use the laboratories and libraries of each other for research, the chancellor said. - [Mehr News on 13-DEC](#)
- The Justice Department announced the successful forfeiture of two large caches of Iranian arms, including 171 surface-to-air missiles and eight anti-tank missiles, as well as approximately 1.1 million barrels of Iranian petroleum products. The U.S. Navy seized the weapons from two vessels in the Arabian Sea while conducting routine maritime security operations. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a designated foreign terrorist organization, orchestrated the arms shipments, which were destined for Houthi militants in Yemen. The U.S. government similarly seized the Iranian petroleum products from four foreign-flagged tankers in or around the Arabian Sea while en route to Venezuela. These actions represent the government's largest-ever forfeitures of fuel and weapons shipments from Iran. - [U.S. Department of Justice Press Release on 07-DEC](#)
- State media reports a delegation of Iranian lawmakers has traveled to Venezuela to observe the parliamentary elections in the South American country. Speaking to Tasnim, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnouri said the parliamentary delegation has gone to Venezuela at the request of the Caracas government. The delegation is composed of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission's vice-chair and spokesperson, as well as members of Iran-Venezuela parliamentary friendship group, Zonnouri noted. - [Tasnim News Agency on 06-DEC](#)
- Under the illegitimate rule of Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela has grown closer than ever to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Absent a robust response from President Biden to isolate both regimes from each other economically and militarily, Venezuela may become a forward operating base in the Western Hemisphere for Iranian forces to undermine U.S. national security. - [Miami Herald on 04-DEC](#)
- Iran has delivered the fourth cargo of crude oil condensate to Venezuela since the start of this year, Reuters has reported, citing a Venezuelan member of parliament—but the condensate is causing PDVSA some quality issues that are hampering crude exports.

Condensate is vital for Venezuela's struggling state oil company PDVSA as it has virtually no other options of importing it amid U.S. sanctions. The superlight crude is used to blend into PDVSA's superheavy crude to make it more liquid and therefore easier to export. - [Oil Price on 03-DEC](#)

- A cargo of Iranian condensate intended for Venezuela's state-run oil company, PDVSA, the fourth delivery this year, will discharge at the country's main oil port, a Venezuelan lawmaker said. - [Reuters on 02-DEC](#)
- State media reports in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency, Bolivian Ambassador to Tehran Romina Guadalupe talked of Iran-Bolivian bilateral relations, as well as the recent international developments. Romina Guadalupe spoke about the current level of Iran-Bolivia relations, Iran's important role in countering US hegemony in the region, as well as Iran's right to have peaceful nuclear activities. - [Mehr News on 30-NOV](#)
- While Iran has been carrying out hostile activities across the Middle East, it is also operating in other areas such as transferring oil and weapons to Venezuela, operating the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force in South America, and trying to grow its presence in Afghanistan. - [Jerusalem Post on 30-NOV](#)
- State media reports in a meeting with former President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Gabriela Cuevas Barron, Ali Nikzad said Latin America is very important for Iran and wished for progress for countries like Mexico, Bolivia and Nicaragua in different fields. "We welcome the exchange of information on parliamentary issues with Mexico," Nikzad said. - [ICANA on 27-NOV](#)
- State media reports the Iran-Brazil Chamber of Commerce was inaugurated in São Paulo, Brazil, in the presence of a group of Iran's parliament members, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on Agriculture, and the deputy of the agriculture minister, and about 200 Iranian and Brazilian businessmen. - [ILNA on 22-NOV](#)
- State media reports Bolivian Ambassador to Tehran Romina Guadalupe, in a meeting with the Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, invited the Iranian private sector to invest in her country's major industries. Guadalupe welcomed the Iranian private sector's investment in medicine and health, mining, gas, and petrochemical projects, the portal of ICCIMA reported. - [Tehran Times on 20-OCT](#)
- Guatemalan authorities stopped two buses carrying members of an extremist Jewish ultra-Orthodox sect from traveling across the border into Mexico, from where they were reportedly planning to reach Iran to seek asylum. At the request of Israeli and US officials, who fear the Lev Tahor community could be used as a bargaining chip by Tehran, Guatemala has already prevented members from flying out of the country as they tried to head to the Islamic Republic. - [Times of Israel on 18-OCT](#)

MADURO'S PREPARATION FOR VISIT TO TEHRAN

- State media reports Maduro has announced upcoming travel to Iran “to accelerate the processes of cooperation at all levels and to sign agreements.” In an interview for *Al Mayadeen*, the Venezuelan president said that the Joint Commission between Iran and Venezuela is working on new plans for relations and cooperation. “We have to continue uniting the entire region of the Arab world, the Middle East, the Muslim world, with Latin America and the Caribbean, we have to do much more to unite spiritually, culturally, politically, to know what is happening in each country, to learn from the struggle and life of each country.” - [Kawsachun News on 27-DEC](#)
- State media reports Iranian President Raisi, in a telephone conversation with Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, called the relations between the two countries strategic, and said: "The current relations between Iran and Venezuela should be bolstered under the new Iranian administration." Referring to the high capacity of the two countries in various areas, he added, "development of relations between Tehran and Caracas is a necessity, especially in trade and economic issues." - [Tehran Times on 06-DEC](#)
- State media reports Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ali Asghar Shalbfavian met and held talks with Venezuela's Minister of Tourism and Foreign Trade Ali Padron on the expansion of tourism cooperation. The two sides discussed a joint tourism cooperation program between the two countries of Iran and Venezuela. The two sides also announced their readiness to develop tourism relations between the two countries, as well as to strengthen interaction in order to provide solutions to the corona crisis in the tourism industry. - [Mehr News on 06-NOV](#)
- State media reports Minister of Tourism of Venezuela, Alí Padrón Paredes has traveled to Iran to participate in the opening ceremony of the Tehran International Tourism and Handicrafts Exhibition. “We consider Iran as our home. Iran is our friend, fortunately, there are good relations between Iran and Venezuela”, said the Venezuelan Minister upon his arrival to Tehran. Attending the Tehran International Tourism and Handicrafts Exhibition, holding meeting Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan, signing the 2024-2020 Tourism agreement, and holding a meeting with a number of private tourism activists are among his plans on the first day of his trip. - [Mehr News on 23-FEB](#)
- 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. “We are ready to expand our relations with Venezuela in the arena of tourism by organizing familiarization tours in both countries with the participation of the private sector,” Mounesan said. He made the remarks in a meeting with the Venezuelan ambassador to Tehran, Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones. - [Tehran Times on 10-NOV-2020](#)
- Within the framework of an official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Executive Secretary of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Pueblos de Nuestra América – Treaty of

Commerce of the Pueblos (ALBA-TCP), Sacha Llorenti, attended a meeting with the ayatollah Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi. During the meeting, the Iranian head of state declared that the Islamic Republic and the member states of the ALBA-TCP have common values and that the deepening of political and economic ties with Latin America constitutes one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the country of Middle East. - [ALBA-TCP on 04-AUG \(content in Spanish\)](#)

HEZBOLLAH

- On November 28, Kenyan and Israeli media reported the arrest of an Iranian businessman by Kenya, whom they suspect was plotting attacks against both local and Israeli targets. These revelations emerge only weeks after Colombia's daily El Tiempo revealed another Iranian failed terror plot, highlighting how Latin America remains a playground for Iranian mischief. - [Real Clear Defense on 02-DEC](#)
- Colombian Defence Minister Diego Molano has surprised many with a statement that will undoubtedly have diplomatic consequences: "Iran and Hezbollah are enemies of the country." Colombia, he said, is monitoring Hezbollah after accusing the militant group of carrying out criminal activities within its borders. - [Iran Wire on 16-NOV](#)
- State media reports Colombia expelled two Hezbollah operatives after a former Israeli intelligence agent was targeted for assassination, Colombian daily El Tiempo has reported. Defense Minister Diego Molano was quoted as saying that two months ago Colombia arrested and then expelled "two Hezbollah-sponsored criminals who had intentions to commit a criminal act in Colombia." The former Israeli agent was secretly taken out of the country when Israeli intelligence realized he was targeted by Hezbollah in a possible assassination attempt. - [Iran International on 15-NOV](#)
- Hezbollah planned to assassinate an Israeli national in Bogota as part of an operation that also targeted Americans to avenge the January 2020 killing of Iranian Qods Force commander General Qassem Soleimani, Colombian newspaper El Tiempo reported. The newspaper said the Israeli targeted by the Lebanese terror group was a former intelligence officer who had been stationed in the city as a member of the diplomatic corps, then opened a company involved in the import and sale of surveillance cameras and technology. - [The Times of Israel on 15-NOV](#)
- Colombian President Iván Duque ended his first visit to Israel on an optimistic note, highlighting increasing business ties and siding with Israel in its Middle East conflicts. Duque, a former senator elected president about three years ago, was accompanied by a large contingent of ministers and businesspeople, on a trip designed to strengthen economic and security ties between the two countries. - [Haaretz on 11-NOV](#)
- Israel Hayom reported that a Venezuelan hacker group by the name Team HDP broke into the country's Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence, gaining access to information on purported Hezbollah operatives living freely in the country under the

protection of the Maduro regime. According to the information stolen by Team HDP, Venezuela also hosts Palestinian terrorist cells involved in money laundering, drug dealing, and terrorist activity, among other crimes. It was also revealed that Cuba's foreign intelligence agency plays a central role in the matter. - [Israel Hayom on 01-NOV](#)

SYRIA

- State media reports Cuba and Syria discussed means of enhancing economic relations between the two countries and the available opportunities to develop them, particularly in the trade exchange field. This came during a meeting held in Havana between Rodrigo Malmierca, Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment of Cuba and Syrian Ambassador to Cuba, Idris Mayya. - [SANA on 09-DEC](#)

TURKEY

- State media reports Uruguay's President Luis Lacalle Pou admitted his country was after one-on-one trade deals with countries other than China and singled out Turkey as a target. Regarding a possible agreement with the United States, Lacalle said it would be a childhood dream come true. If a deal is finally reached, Turkey's presence in the region will have found yet another partner. - [MercoPress on 23-DEC](#)
- State media reports Maduro had discussed in a telephone conversation a series of bilateral issues with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Today #21Dec, I had an excellent phone conversation with the President of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. We talked about the great challenges for the coming years and the need to advance in all areas of cooperation for shared development. We shall prevail!" Maduro posted on social media. - [MercoPress on 22-DEC](#)
- Cuba is attempting to solve a big problem with help from a Turkish Company. Sitting in the Havana Harbor is a "power barge," one of four in Cuba now providing a portion of Cuba's electrical power. Another one of the power ships is moored in the Port of Muriel. - [CBS Miami on 09-DEC](#)
- A delegation of parliamentarians from Latin America arrived in the Turkish capital Ankara today to take part in the two-day Parliamentarians for Al-Quds conference. The President of the Association of Parliamentarians for Al-Quds in Latin America, Ahmed Said Murad, from Brazil joined the delegation, along with Congresswoman in the Parliament of Mercosur Julie Berry, the Bolivian Minister of Justice Virginia Valasco, Uruguayan Congresswoman Sandra Lazo, Chilean Congressman Sergio Gahona, Mexican Congresswoman Julieta Ramirez, Congresswoman from Guatemala Andrea Villagren, and Brazilian Congresswoman Perpetua Almeida. - [Middle East Monitor on 30-NOV](#)
- A Miami man, Samir Handal, was arrested in Turkey on suspicion of involvement in the assassination of Haiti's president in July, was on his way to visit his sick mother in the holy city of Bethlehem, his family says. - [Univision on 18-NOV](#)

- A Haitian businessman considered a suspect in the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moise was arrested in Turkey, authorities in Haiti announced. Haitian Foreign Minister Claude Joseph said on his Twitter account that he spoke with his Turkish counterpart about the arrest of Samir Handal, but gave no more details, including whether Haiti would seek the man's extradition. - [Los Angeles Times on 15-NOV](#)

UAE

- The UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and the Panama Maritime Authority signed a preliminary agreement to enhance training and boost watchkeeping for seafarers. The agreement will enable seafarers who hold certificates of competency and proficiency to serve on vessels registered under the flag of either party. - [The National on 11-DEC](#)

QATAR

- State media reports Uruguay's President Luis Lacalle Pou returned home from an official trip to Qatar in search of trade opportunities for his country. He reached an agreement regarding visas while air routes and direct investments are being studied. Lacalle Pou also said he was "satisfied" after a meeting with Qatar Airways executives, with whom he discussed a plan to expand air connectivity with Uruguay, a country which lacked air services with some parts of the world. - [MercoPress on 17-DEC](#)
- State media reports Panama's ambassador in Doha, Musa Asvat, has praised Qatar's efforts and initiatives and the great role it has played in supporting just causes and providing humanitarian aid to brotherly and friendly countries in various regions of the world. - [Gulf Times on 12-DEC](#)
- State media reports Argentina is looking to attract Qatari investments in the fields of food production and agriculture, according to ambassador Marcelo Gilardoni, who said further discussions are underway to promote growth in both countries' bilateral relations. Gilardoni stressed that aside from looking to improve Qatar-Argentina economic ties, the embassy is "working very closely" with Qatar to meet the objectives of the country's food security strategy. - [Gulf Times on 11-DEC](#)
- State media reports the ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to Qatar Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado affirmed the deep relations and bonds of friendship between the State of Qatar and his country and its consolidation and continuous development. In an exclusive statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the National Day of the Country, he referred to the two visits paid by HE President of the Federative Republic of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro, to the State of Qatar in 2019 and 2021, and the great progress that resulted from the two visits in many areas of bilateral cooperation, with a focus on trade, investment and tourism. - [Gulf Times on 09-DEC](#)
- State media reports Mexican Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said the Qatari presence in various sports and cultural activities in Mexico represents a unique strategy for

strengthening bilateral relations and bonds of co-operation. This came in a speech delivered by Ebrard during a sporting event organised by the Institute for Mexicans Abroad of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, in which Qatar's ambassador to Mexico Mohamed bin Jassim al-Kuwari participated. - [Gulf Times on 05-DEC](#)

ALEX SAAB

- State media reports Nicolás Maduro asserted that the United States sabotaged the opposition dialogue that was taking place in Mexico. In an interview with Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet, broadcast by teleSUR, the head of state reported that the kidnapping of diplomat Alex Saab by the USA, illegally detained in Cape Verde, was the reason for the rupture of the dialogue. - [TeleSUR on 03-JAN](#)
- The Oversight Commission of the National Assembly of Ecuador will send the prosecution offices of five countries the investigation of a corruption case involving businessman Alex Saab, identified as a front man for the Venezuelan dictator, Nicolás Maduro. This parliamentary commission approved the report that links Saab in a case of alleged fictitious exports made between Ecuador and Venezuela in the past, through a compensation system called "SUCRE." - [Infobae on 17-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Alex Saab, an ally of Maduro, has pleaded not guilty to a U.S. charge of conspiring to launder money, according to a court document. - [Reuters on 15-NOV](#)
- A close ally of Maduro will now be arraigned on charges of money laundering in federal court in Miami on November 15, two weeks later than originally planned, in a case that has further strained already frayed relations between Washington and Caracas. - [Reuters on 01-NOV](#)
- A U.S. judge in Florida dismissed money laundering counts against Alex Saab, an ally of Maduro, but he remains accused of one count of conspiracy to launder money, a court filing showed. The order was issued by U.S. District Judge Robert Scola. The conspiracy charge that remains carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. - [Reuters on 01-NOV](#)