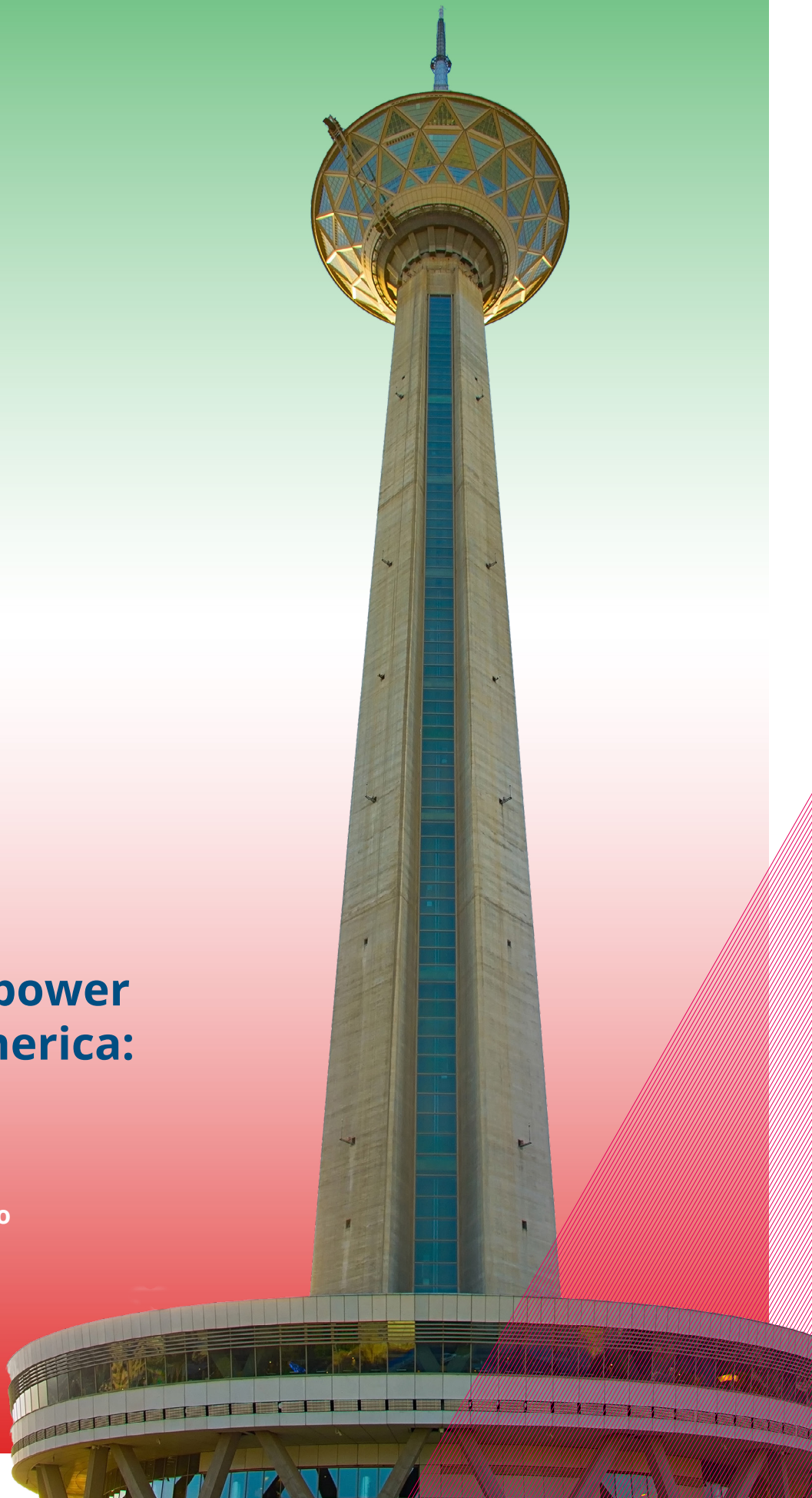


Iran's soft power in Latin America: HispanTV

Sergio Castaño Riaño

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Summary

Despite the great distance that separates Iran from Latin American countries, the government of Tehran has intensified its efforts to increase its presence in the continent. To this end, it has developed a comprehensive soft power strategy based on a narrative that aims to connect with the interests of the Latin American left. Iran, with its approach to Latin American countries, seeks to gain international support to reinforce the anti-U.S. rhetoric and contribute to the creation of an alternative world order.

1. Iran in Latin America

The globalized world has made it possible to break down borders and bring cultures closer together, even those as distant as the Persian and the Latin American cultures. Contacts between both realities were minimal throughout history, and it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that Iran established its first diplomatic relations in the region, specifically with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. It took more than thirty years for the Persian government to initiate relations with Mexico; however, in this case, they were not formalized until 1964.

Latin America was not a priority for Iranian foreign policy before the 1979 revolution. It was not until both Iran and Venezuela got involved in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) which brought the two countries closer together.

However, over the past two decades, shifts in the geopolitical landscape have spurred Iran's growing interest in Latin America, prompting the government in Tehran to strengthen political ties with certain countries and to establish solid commercial relations with others.

2. What do we know about Iran?

For a large part of the 20th century, Iran was ruled by the Shah of Persia, who operated under the influence of American and British directives. The Shah's leadership faced growing scrutiny stirring widespread discontent that culminated in the 1979 revolution, which saw the establishment of a theocratic government led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

The situation forced the Shah to flee the country, seeking refuge in Mexico. This led to the freezing

of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the new Iranian government from 1979 to 1992. Likewise, Khomeini broke ties with the United States, and following the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, hostility between the two nations has been ever increasing.

3. The Islamic Republic

The Islamic Republic, as a theocratic regime, has significantly influenced the daily lives of its citizens through various means. The implementation of new laws introduced codes of conduct and dress regulations, which sparked dissatisfaction among segments of society that had initially supported the revolution but did not align with the conservative values of Shia Islam enforced by the new government and its mode of coexistence.

To ensure adherence to these regulations among women, the Iranian government established the morality police, whose mission is to ensure that women and girls dress correctly, following the standards set by the highest levels of the state.

In addition to government pressure on women, the lack of freedoms manifests in numerous other spheres. One of the facets limiting freedom and affecting all visitors to Iran is the limitations imposed on the use of the internet and social media. The only way to escape these restrictions is to install a VPN software on the terminals which bypasses the Iranian government-controlled servers. That practice is quite common among young Iranians.

The heightened restrictions came in response to the social unrest following the arrest and subsequent death of Masha Amini in the final months of 2022.

Perhaps the prohibitions on women's clothing are the most striking. However, in Iran many issues are regulated by law, unlike in other Muslim-majority countries where they are typically governed solely by tradition and cultural norms, without legal repercussions. Such prohibitions

The only way to escape these restrictions is to install a VPN software on the terminals which bypasses the Iranian government-controlled servers. That practice is quite common among young Iranians.

extend to everything that is haram for Islam. This allows the Iranian government to leverage religious principles as an effective tool for social control.

4. Iran's global projection

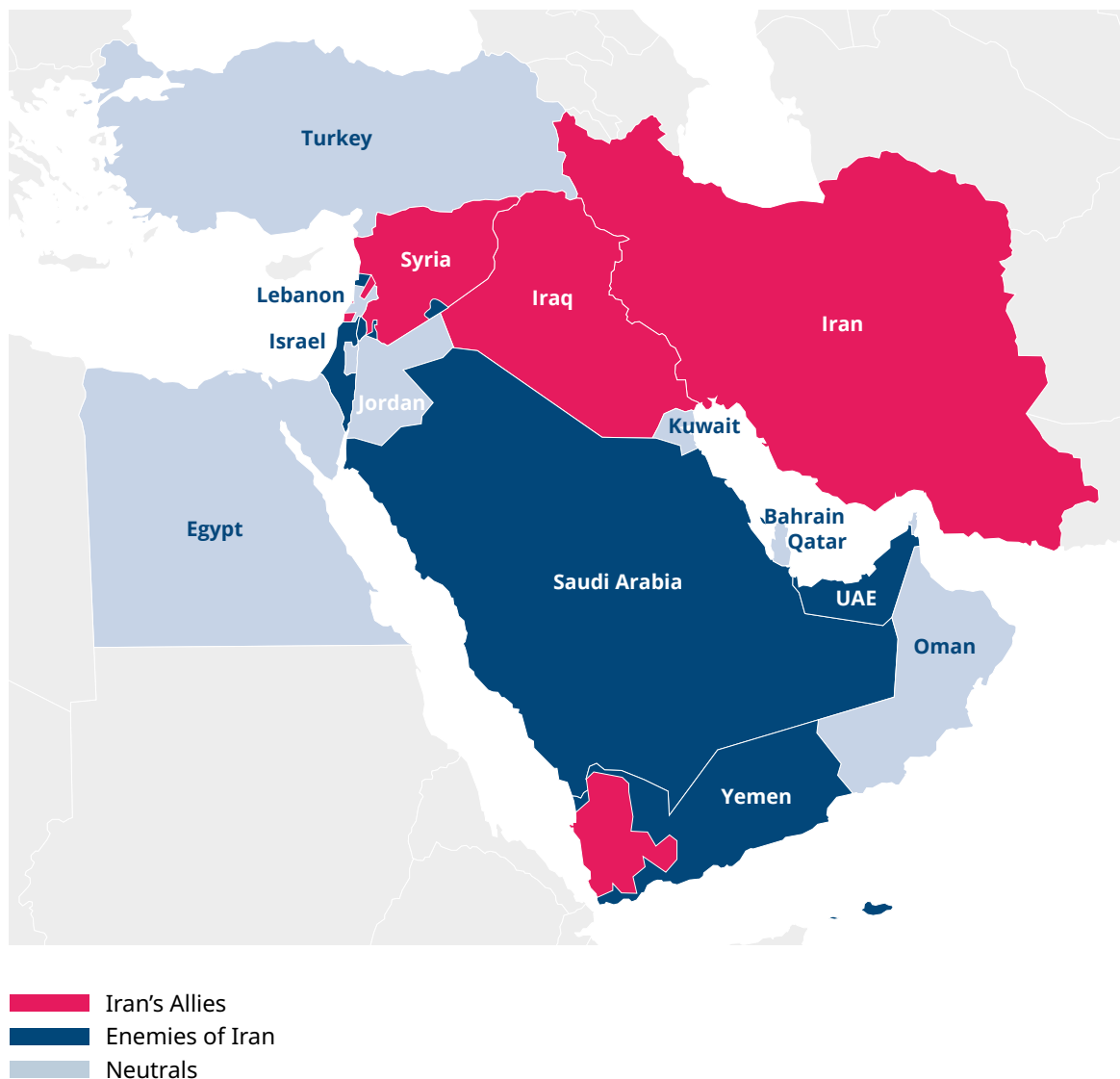
After the triumph of the revolution, Iran bolstered its military capabilities to assert itself as a hegemonic power in the Middle East. This ambition led to conflicts and tensions with other regional powers.

Iran's strategy to expand its influence in the Middle East involves supporting Shia militias in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as providing assistance to Hamas. This support has also been the focus of controversy within the international community.

In this context, international tensions escalated when clandestine uranium enrichment facilities were discovered in 2002, which many countries interpreted as evidence of a nuclear weapons program.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the Iranian presidency in 2005 and opted to revive the nuclear program, it triggered a response from a significant portion of the international community, which started to view Iran as a substantial security threat. From that point onward, sanctions

Figure 1. Current balance of power in the region



Source: *El Español*

against Iran intensified, leading to the country's near isolation within the international context in which the United States acted as the only hegemonic power.

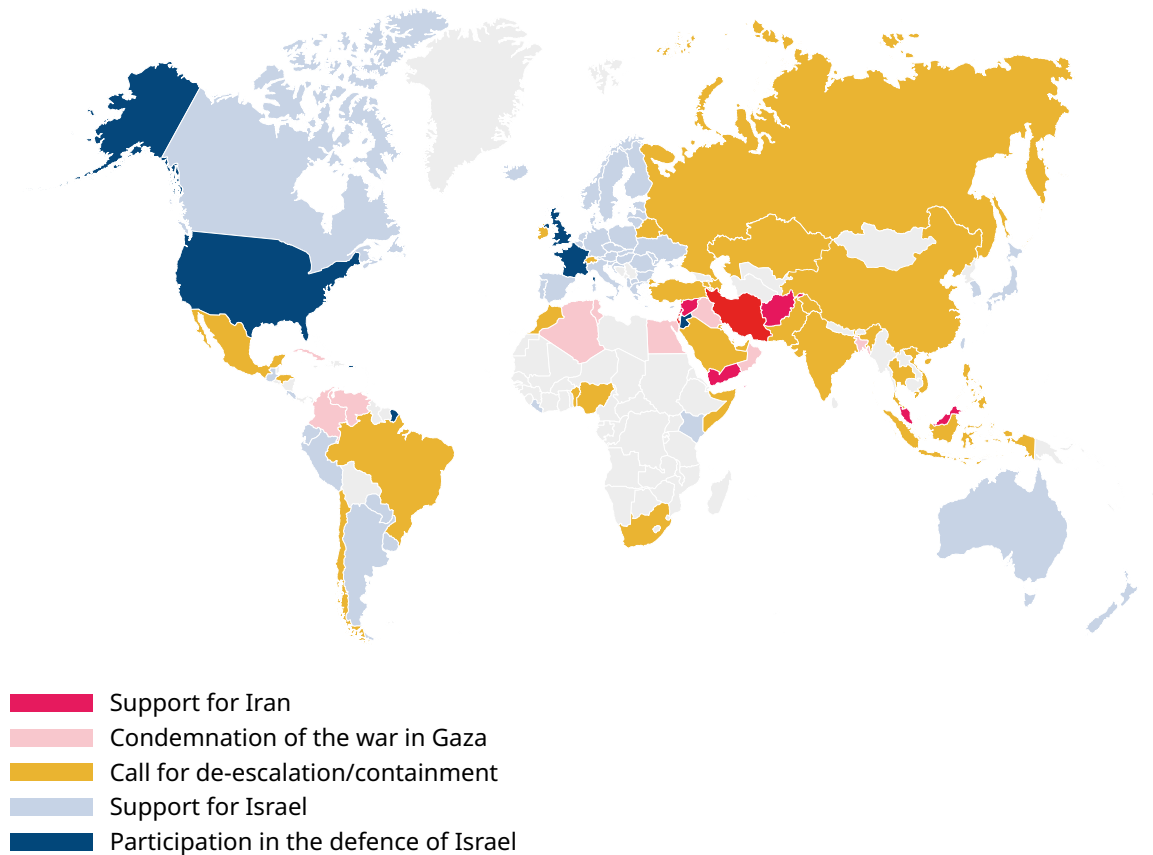
Against this backdrop, it was inevitable for Iran to seek new alliances and international support to mitigate the impact of sanctions and global isolation. In this sense, Latin America became the ideal destination to pursue this objective.

Iran sought to establish a stronger presence, recognition, and acceptance worldwide by implementing a comprehensive soft power strategy centered on diplomacy, persuasion, and increased cultural activity.

The initial consideration for Iran was determining where to direct its soft power strategy. The global landscape suggested focusing on countries that, similarly to Iran, were impacted by

Figure 2. Current support for Iran in the world

Reactions to the Iranian attack on Israeli territory on 13 and 14 April 2024



Source: *Grand Continent*. Map updated as of 15 April 2024

US sanctions, potentially serving as gateways to consolidate alliances.

Besides seeking international support, Iran's ambition was to contribute to the formation of an alternative global bloc that could weaken the unassailable hegemony upheld by the United States during that period. In this regard, Venezuela was the perfect country to initiate its activities in Latin America.

5. Why Latin America?

With the aim of securing international support, Iranian President Mohammed Khatami journeyed

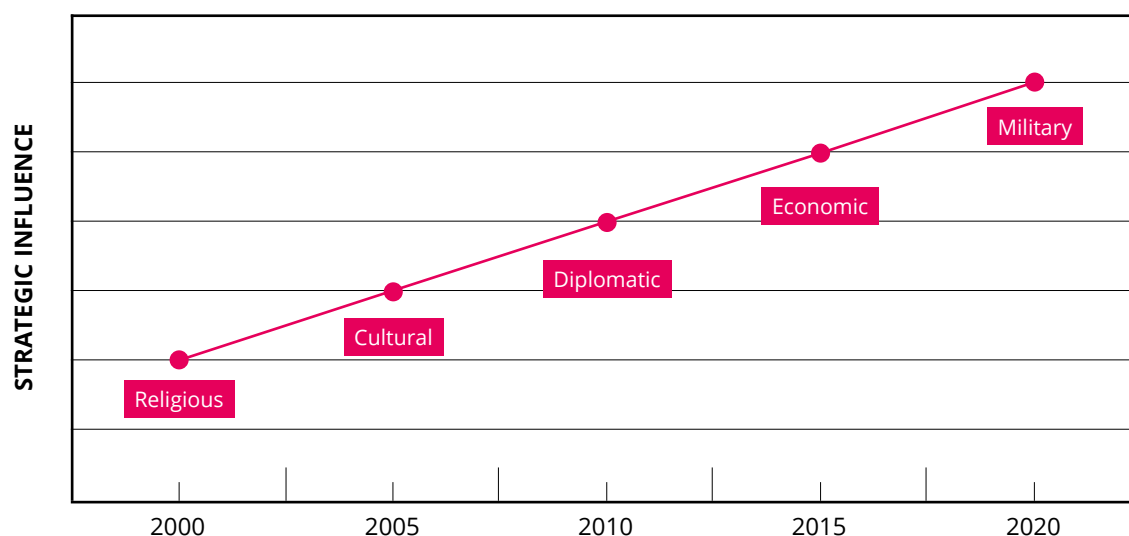
to Venezuela to engage with Hugo Chavez in the early 2000s, aiming to forge agreements that extended beyond the realm of economics.

Both Iran and Venezuela had openly opposed the hegemony of the United States and, simultaneously, were grappling with sanctions imposed by Washington. This situation facilitated the formation of a coalition that could coordinate joint actions and condemn the impact of the sanctions to the international community.

However, a genuine harmony with Iran was established when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the presidency and intensified efforts to strengthen ties with Venezuela while also initiating closer

Figure 3. Iran's presence in Latin America

IRAN'S PATTERN OF PENETRATION OF LATIN AMERICA



Source: *Diálogo Américas*.

relations with other Latin American countries. Except for information opposing the Iranian regime, which might originate from the United States, Iran remained a largely unknown country to a significant portion of the population in Latin American nations. Therefore, for Iranian leaders, Latin America presented the opportunity to secure steadfast allies in the region.

6. The alliance

The alliance forged between Chávez and Ahmadinejad was realized through the development of a shared narrative. To achieve this, the revolutionary nature of both the Iranian and Venezuelan governments was emphasized, highlighting the factors that facilitated the connection between the Bolivarian Revolution, initiated by Hugo Chávez in 1998, and the Iranian Revolution. Both aimed to solidify their respective political systems free from interference by major powers, although the models advocated by each revolution were antagonistic.

In reality, the two revolutions shared little, if anything, beyond a mutual opposition to so-called Western imperialism. However, this shared goal of opposing the interests of the United States and its allies globally bolstered their rhetoric and encouraged other nations to join the effort to advance towards an alternative world order.

Consequently, Latin American nations aligned with Venezuela's ideological stance, such as Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Cuba, along with the cooperation of Ecuador under the leadership of Rafael Correa at the time, swiftly embraced the initiative and initiated discussions with the Iranian president. During that period, Cuba and Venezuela promoted the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) project, which aimed at laying the groundwork for Latin America to advance towards the socialism of the 21st century. In such circumstances, the nations advocating for ALBA agreed to enhance ties with Iran and include it as an observer member in their project. The major question that arose was: how to integrate a Shia Islamist political model into the framework of the 21st-century socialism?

Figure 4. Ahmadinejad and Chávez



Source: *El Mundo*.

The alliance between the Bolivarian nations and Iran attempted to be cloaked in an ideological veneer that, in reality, lacked a solid foundation. This was because many of the issues championed by leftist groups in Latin America, such as abortion, gender equality, same-sex marriage, gender reassignment, and euthanasia, are condemned in Iran, with some carrying the penalty of death. In contrast, these issues are fully normalized in countries like Cuba.

It is therefore contradictory that a conservative country, deeply rooted in strong religious values, would support leftist governments and political groups with principles diametrically opposed to those upheld by the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, Iran's recent focus has been on defending Bolivarian governments and backing leftist alternatives in countries where they oppose the current regimes. Hence, beyond the ideological aspect, the underlying reason behind the relations

between Iranians and Bolivarians stemmed from strategic and pragmatic interests.

Therefore, these countries share a common interest aimed at ending the hegemony of the Western empire and establishing a solid bloc of countries capable of countering U.S. supremacy.

7. Soft power strategy

The soft power strategy of Iran's foreign policy was centered around three primary pillars: diplomacy, propagating its narrative, and forging trade alliances.

In the specific case of Latin America, Iran recognized that its outreach to the countries within the Bolivarian bloc was inadequate in achieving its objectives of establishing a significant presence on the continent. Hence, the strategy in

Latin America not only aimed to strengthen the existing alliances with ALBA countries but also prioritized expanding its influence to the nations holding the most prominence in the region.

The primary focus was on engaging with major economies in the region, such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Iran sought not only political alliances but also commercial partnerships. Likewise, initiatives were undertaken to expand Iranian influence on other significant countries like Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, and Colombia. However, in this case, the anti-imperialist rhetoric that resonated strongly in Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Bolivia might face resistance in countries less aligned with the ideals of the Bolivarian left. However, the democratic turnover in many of these nations and the rise of “progressive” governments facilitated Iran’s infiltration into Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

The case of Argentina, where Peronism governed with Presidents Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández between 2003 and 2015, merits special mention. The left’s leadership in the country would seemingly have created a favorable environment for Iran. However, the terrorist history of Shia groups linked with Iran in Argentina led to a consistent rejection of any proposals originating from the Islamic Republic. Therefore, the unresolved issues stemming from the terrorist attacks on Jewish targets in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994 hindered Iran’s ability to establish a direct channel of collaboration with the Argentine government.

As evident, the progressive wave spreading across various Latin American countries fortified Iran’s interests in the region. What course of action should be pursued in countries like Mexico, Colombia, Chile, or Peru, where the left was not in power and significant ties with the United States were maintained?

Iran’s answer was straightforward: if their proposals found favor in nations governed by the left, the strategy for other countries should involve backing political groups advocating “progressive” agendas. The aim was to consolidate

ideological unity in Latin America and thereby expand the influence of governments sympathetic to Iran’s interests.

8. Sympathy with Iran?

In a move to consolidate its presence in Latin America, Iran initiated an intensive effort in 2007 to establish embassies in Nicaragua, Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia. Two years later, it opened an embassy in Ecuador. Consequently, with diplomatic missions already operational in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Venezuela, Iran succeeded in establishing a significant official presence in Latin America.

Simultaneously, Iran established trade agreements with various nations. It secured significant outcomes in Brazil and Argentina, now serving as the region’s two primary trading partners.

Finally, the Tehran government intensified its communication strategy, recognizing it as a crucial tool for garnering influence, attaining recognition, and endorsing political initiatives conducive to advancing its interests in Latin America.

In this regard, the key was to try to align the actions of the Iranian government with the public opinion. To accomplish this objective, Iran expanded its presence on social media platforms, a move that contrasts with its approach to internet usage within its borders. Additionally, it established a Spanish-language television channel.

9. HispanTV

The creation of international news channels began in the 1980s with the British public broadcaster BBC and the private U.S. broadcaster CNN leading the way. Both channels became benchmarks in international news. Consequently, numerous governments opted to establish their own international news channels as a means to present an alternative perspective on conflicts tailored to their respective interests.

Figure 5. Iran's embassies in Latin America



Source: *Atalayar*.

The Tehran government intensified its communication strategy, recognizing it as a crucial tool for garnering influence, attaining recognition, and endorsing political initiatives conducive to advancing its interests in Latin America.

The significance of the Spanish language and its potential for reaching millions of people facilitated the emergence of Spanish-language channels from various countries. Therefore, following the example of other nations, Iran also launched its news channels: PressTV, in English, in 2009, and HispanTV, in Spanish, which commenced broadcasting in 2012. The creation of this media platform bolstered Tehran's strategy to gain and establish its presence in Latin America.

President Ahmadinejad personally inaugurated the broadcasts on January 31, 2012, delivering a speech in which he framed the channel as an endeavor to unite Iran with Spanish-speaking populations and as an ideological tool to counter those seeking global dominance. Thus, HispanTV and its website emerged as Iran's primary soft power tool in Latin American nations.

The channel is part of the state-owned Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Corporation (IRIB), overseen by the Council of Guardians of the Constitution, which appoints all its directors and establishes the editorial line. The Council, which represents religious power, is appointed by the head of state, Ayatollah Khamenei, and supervises the actions of the government and the decisions of Parliament to ensure that they comply with the constitutional principles. Thus, the content of HispanTV also adheres to the criteria

set by the Guardian Council and undergoes an ideological screening mandated by Iran's religious authorities, who additionally provide full financial backing for the channel.

10. Gaining audience and credibility

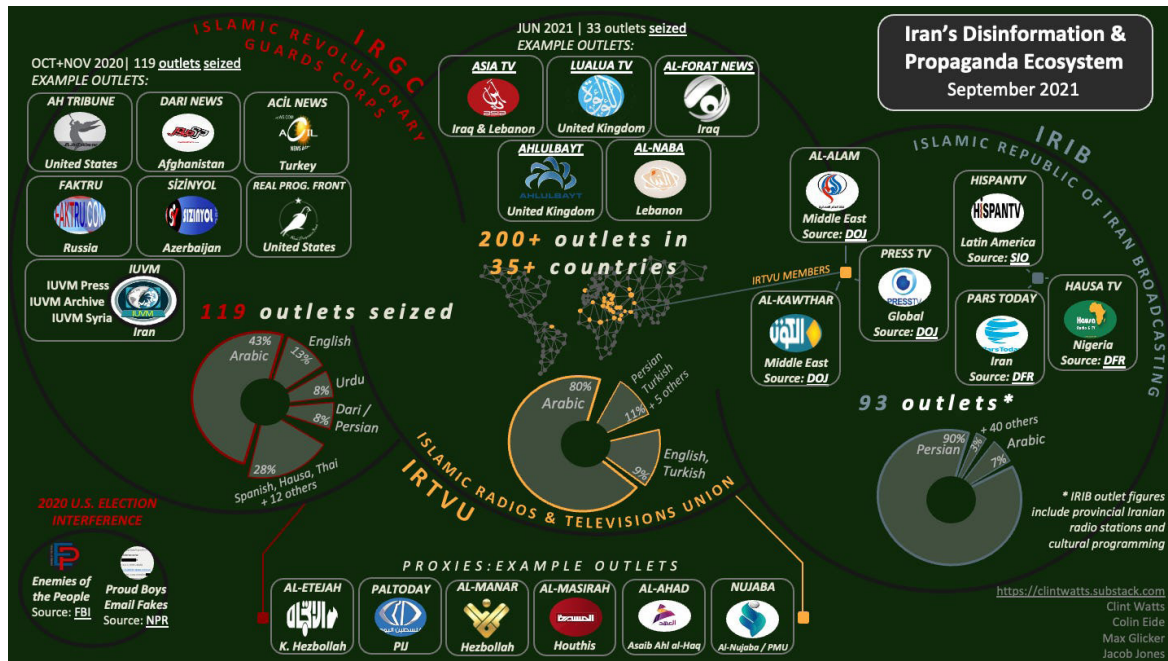
The Persian government's initial investment in HispanTV entailed a substantial financial expenditure. The channel set up its main studios in Tehran, from which news programs were originally broadcasted. However, between 2012 and 2018, the majority of programs were produced from studios in Madrid. The expansion of operations in Spain was facilitated through independent production companies based in Madrid: 360 Global Media Producciones Audiovisuales HispanTV and Producciones Audiovisuales PressTV. These were overseen by Iranian businessman Mahmoud Alizadeh Azimi, who served as the liaison with Tehran.

Having a presence in the Spanish capital enabled the channel to enlist well-known personalities for its programs, thereby facilitating connections with the audience. This approach aimed to enhance credibility, leveraging figures such as Spanish journalist David Tejera, known for his years as a news anchor on Antena 3 and CNN+ channels, as well as Ana Peralta, who brought experience from Cadena Ser radio and worked at the central studios in Tehran.

To produce certain programs aired from Madrid, they enlisted Gustavo Morales, former director of the newspaper Ya, who helmed the political talk show Enfoque and directed Orientan, featuring a similar debate format. Despite continuous communication between the central studios and Madrid, the process was overshadowed by the lack of transparency from Tehran, impeding the participation of workers in Spain in the decision-making process.

The lack of transparency from the Iranian government makes it impossible to obtain official figures regarding the investment made to set

Figure 6. Iranian media structure



Source: [Clint Watts](https://clintwatts.substack.com).

up HispanTV. Nevertheless, it was evidently a substantial investment aimed at establishing a prominent media presence. Over time, budgetary constraints led to a reduction in operations in Madrid, with the channel's activities increasingly concentrated in the Iranian capital.

While Iran also aimed to interfere in Spanish affairs, its primary focus was on Latin America. To this end, they recruited journalists from various Latin American countries, including Mexican Roberto de la Madrid and Colombian Luis Javier González, who relocated to Tehran to serve as anchors for the news programs.

Similarly, HispanTV recruited correspondents in most Latin American countries and forged connections with agencies in other parts of the world. However, in these instances, it refrained from opening additional offices or expanding infrastructure beyond basic coverage needed for reporting from these locations. Consequently, the channel provided extensive coverage of international events. Several of HispanTV's

correspondents in Latin America have maintained their association with the channel for an extended period. Notable among them are Sara Morales, correspondent in Panama, and Leonel Retamal, the former voice of HispanTV in Chile.

Retamal's case illustrates the close alignment between HispanTV and its counterparts, the Venezuelan Telesur and the Russian RT. These three channels adopt a remarkably similar approach to news and often collaborate by sharing reporters and analysts. Therefore, after working for the Iranian channel, Leonel Retamal proceeded with his journalism career at Telesur. Similarly, HispanTV's current correspondent in Argentina, Sebastián Salgado, joined the channel at its beginning after serving as a reporter for Telesur..

11. Correspondents, analysts and censorship

Journalist Rudy Jorge Jordán Espejo analyzes in an investigation the work of the reporters after

having been a correspondent of the network in Peru between 2017 and 2019. In his study, Jordán Espejo (2020) outlines how the work of HispanTV correspondents was and provides insight into their compensation, which amounted to \$220 per news piece broadcast.

Jordán Espejo also elucidates how censorship was enforced by the network, often leading to self-censorship by the editorial team which was aware that they could not cover certain topics. He highlights the explicit directives regarding the network's editorial stance: "We are leftists, we hate the United States, and we cover all protests."

Viewers of HispanTV, RT, or Telesur will likely recognize the familiar faces of Juanlu González, Aníbal Garzón, Carlos Martínez, or Pablo Jofré Leal. These political analysts are frequent collaborators with the three channels, advocating for the principles of the Bolivarian left. Similarly, these analysts criticize any initiatives undertaken by governments that do not align with this ideology.

Regarding their fees, analysts received \$40 for brief three-minute analyses. The news broadcasts aired every hour, featuring one or two analysts each time. This suggests that initially, the payments were substantial. However, starting in 2018, they ceased paying analysts and entered a phase of cutbacks once the channel had achieved consolidation.

Fort Apache

Among the professionals hired by HispanTV in 2013 was Pablo Iglesias Turrión, who was then a young university professor associated with far-left political movements in Spain. Iglesias took on the role of directing and hosting the debate talk show Fort Apache, which focused on international issues with a predetermined bias aligned with the interests of leftist movements and those of Iran. The Fort Apache debates were consistently one-sided, designed to discredit governments that opposed their ideological stance and to question the role of the United States and its allies on the international stage.

Hence, the recruitment of Pablo Iglesias unequivocally aligned with Iran's interests: bolster governments and leftist parties in Latin America and Spain, and advocate for the necessity of advancing towards the establishment of a new world order.

The Fort Apache program was climbing in the ratings, and its host gained increasing prominence in the media. Iglesias started making frequent appearances as a guest on talk shows and interviews across major television channels and radio stations in Spain, eventually becoming a media figure.

During that period, Pablo Iglesias co-founded the political party Podemos, along with other professors from the Complutense University of Madrid. Podemos established significant ties with the Venezuelan government. The Iranian and Venezuelan support played a decisive role in enabling Podemos to establish itself as a political party and emerge as the third major political force in Spain. In this context, the coalition government formed by the Socialist Party and Podemos after the November 2019 elections led to Pablo Iglesias assuming the role of vice president of the Spanish government. Consequently, he had to end his collaborations with HispanTV.

As evident, the Iranian strategy had successfully met its goals in Spain and was also starting to yield promising outcomes in countries like Mexico, where Andrés Manuel López Obrador had won the presidential elections just a year prior. However, the challenge for Latin America was somewhat more complex, as it lacked an infrastructure as robust as the one established by the Iranian regime's television in Spain.

12. Reactions to HispanTV's broadcasts

The content aired by HispanTV has been contentious from the beginning. Its alternative perspectives on international affairs were quickly branded as fake news and manipulated information. In this regard, upon analyzing the news broadcast by

Figure 7. Pablo Iglesias in Fort Apache



Source: *Libertad Digital*.

the Iranian channel, it becomes apparent that beyond fabricating fake news, what occurs is a biased interpretation of the facts that presents them from an entirely different perspective.

The Hispan TV website provides numerous examples that highlight the contrast between the editorial stance of the Iranian channel and that of European or US media. One such example involves an analysis of headlines published following the recognition of Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela by certain countries in 2019.

HispanTV:

- «U.S. and Some Countries Support Coup Leader Guaidó as President» (January 23, 2019).
- «Frangie: U.S. and EU Cannot Bend Maduro Using Guaidó» (January 31, 2019).

These headlines stand in stark contrast to those used by other media outlets associated with U.S. or EU interests:

CNN:

- «National Assembly President Juan Guaidó Proclaims Himself Interim President of Venezuela» (January 23, 2019).

Euronews:

- «European Parliament Again Recognizes Juan Guaidó as Interim President of Venezuela» (January 16, 2020).

Another example can be seen in more recent headlines concerning the conflict between Iran and Israel, particularly those related to Iran's attack on Israeli territory:

HispanTV:

- «Fear and Terror of Iranian Retaliation Has Paralyzed Israel» (April 12, 2024).
- «Attack on Israel Showed New Level of Iran's Military Authority» (April 17, 2024).

CNN:

- «Israel Does not Seek War After Iran Attack, Says President Herzog» (April 14, 2024).

Euronews:

- «Israel Neutralizes Iranian Attack with Drones and Missiles» (14.4.2024).

The editorial line of HispanTV and its English counterpart, PressTV, so different from the rest of the media, has been considered a threat by several European countries and the United States from the outset. This situation prompted an immediate response in Europe, leading to actions such as the British government's decision in 2012 and the Spanish government's decision in 2013 to block its broadcasts.

Similarly, HispanTV and PressTV have been banned from several U.S. platforms, including Google, Facebook, and X since 2019. However, this attempt to prevent Iran from broadcasting its content has not had the same impact in Latin America, where HispanTV has been included as one of the channels in the offerings of several television streaming platforms.

Currently, due to restrictions imposed in certain countries, while HispanTV is accessible on various platforms, it primarily utilizes the internet as the main means of delivering its content.

Furthermore, broadcasts via its website are complemented by activity on social networks that mirror its content. In this regard and in response to YouTube's boycott, the Iranian government established in 2019 Urmmedium, its own video broadcasting platform, to disseminate the content of HispanTV and PressTV.

13. HispanTV and the accusations

It is noteworthy that a regime which disregards certain rights and freedoms and restricts its citizens from accessing audiovisual content produced in other countries, would invoke the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to assert its right to information.

In 2013, the channel's website published a post titled "What's Behind the Censorship of HispanTV?"

Figure 8. HispanTV cable television



Source: [HispanTV Instagram](#).

In response, they cited Article 19 of the Declaration, which asserts that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression."

More recently, the channel celebrated its twelfth anniversary and emphasized that "The alternative channel has reached its twelfth anniversary despite facing significant censorship" (February 1, 2024); "Despite all the restrictions imposed by media hegemony, the entire HispanTV team remains steadfast in its primary commitment".

Another post on its website highlights the award given by the Club de Periodistas de México (Journalists Club of Mexico) to HispanTV for its efforts in disseminating information in defense of the truth (November 30, 2023). It also mentions the recognition given to Arturo Calvillo, its correspondent in Mexico, and reiterates the channel's commitment to independent journalism outside of Western interests.

HispanTV's arguments evoke rejection in many sectors, but also garner applause from groups aligned with the discourse of the Bolivarian left, who expect HispanTV to bolster their positions.

Figure 9. Anniversary



Source: *HispanTV*.

14. Audiences and narrative

The objective of the Iranian government with its HispanTV channel is not to compete in viewership with the primary Spanish-language news channels, but rather to ensure that the Iranian discourse reaches an increasingly larger audience and permeates across broad sectors of society.

Thus, rather than aiming to attain mass audiences, HispanTV seeks to serve as a tool for global propaganda for the Iranian regime, capable of perpetually broadcasting messages that are then propagated through various communication platforms of extreme left-wing activism. Among these platforms, we can highlight the website *Rebelión* or the Argentine news portal *Resumen Latinoamericano*, which echo HispanTV's news and disseminate the messages among their followers. As a result, social networks serve as a multiplier tool, enabling the Iranian narrative to reach millions of people. For this reason, despite HispanTV's reduced economic resources compared to its beginnings, the Iranian government continues

to invest in this television channel as one of the primary instruments to exert its soft power and pursue its geopolitical objectives.

15. Impact on Latin America

Iran achieved its objectives in Spain and played a role in elevating its TV star, Pablo Iglesias, to the position of vice president of the government. However, has Iran experienced comparable successes in Latin America?

It is worthwhile to examine the political shifts witnessed in recent years in countries like Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Chile. Additionally, it is noteworthy to observe the resurgence of Peronism in Argentina under Alberto Fernández (2018-2023), as well as the return of Luiz Inácio *Lula da Silva* to the presidency of Brazil (2023).

The presidents of the aforementioned countries were not HispanTV stars nor were they propelled by the Iranian channel within their respective

nations. However, the influence of the Iranian narrative could ultimately play a role in their favor in securing electoral victories. Allow us to elaborate further.

15.1. Colombia

In the case of Colombia, Gustavo Petro received unwavering support from HispanTV during his presidential campaign. His electoral victory was celebrated by HispanTV with headlines such as “Colombia Wins!” (May 30, 2022) and “Victory of the Left in Colombia is a Defeat for the US” (June 21, 2022). Additionally, Petro’s inauguration ceremony saw the attendance of the Iranian vice-president, Seyed Mohammad Hosseini, marking an initial step towards strengthening ties between both countries.

Petro was the candidate who aligned with the geostrategic interests of Iran and Russia in Colombia. Consequently, both countries coordinated their propaganda efforts to support a political shift in Colombia, where the left had never previously held power.

While many Western media outlets have emphasized Gustavo Petro’s guerrilla past, HispanTV has made only one reference to his association with the 19th of April Movement (M19), dating back to 2014 when Petro was serving as mayor of Bogota. The Iranian network downplayed this matter by portraying Colombia as a country “accustomed to war” (January 2, 2014). Aside from this mention, the remaining information analyzed does not acknowledge any connection between Gustavo Petro and the M19.

HispanTV’s backing of Petro persisted after he assumed the presidency. On several occasions, it has underlined Petro’s efforts to negotiate agreements with Iran, as well as the rapprochement between Colombia and Venezuela, with headlines such as “Colombia and Venezuela Embrace: Sisters who Should Never Have Been Separated” (August 30, 2022).

While the Iranian network shielded Petro, many other media outlets criticized the Colombian

president, even going as far as labeling him as a puppet of Iran and Russia.

On the other hand, HispanTV’s defense of Petro has also covered the corruption allegations involving his son, dismissing them as a “political maneuver”.

15.2. México

In Mexico, the left-wing bet had been embodied in the figure of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) since the 2006 presidential elections. Therefore, HispanTV’s focus was on AMLO, who aligned himself with revolutionary, anti-capitalist ideals and was critical of U.S. hegemony. In this regard, it is worth noting that Mexico’s heavy reliance on trade with the United States has compelled AMLO to temper his rhetoric against his northern neighbor. Nonetheless, AMLO has advocated for an open foreign policy and the pursuit of agreements with other nations.

Since his controversial electoral loss in 2006, López Obrador has made significant efforts to convey his message to all Mexicans. Finally, in the 2018 elections, AMLO secured victory and was inaugurated as President of the Republic.

López Obrador’s victory was celebrated on HispanTV with the headline “López Obrador’s Triumph Tipped the Regional Scale” (December 29, 2018). Similarly, in 2021, one could find headlines like “AMLO Is Reviving Mexico’s Anti-Imperialist Conscience” (December 2, 2021). At this juncture, two questions arise: What role did Iran play in this lengthy process, and what is the perception of Mexican public opinion regarding Iranian interests in the country?

Regarding the first question, an examination of the news aired by HispanTV provides compelling evidence of the network’s support for the Mexican leftist candidate. However, upon assuming the presidency, AMLO found himself compelled to moderate his rhetoric and accommodate the demands of the United States. During 2018 and 2019, President Donald Trump advocated for the renegotiation of the Free Trade Agreement, leaving

Mexico with limited bargaining power. Likewise, López Obrador had little leverage to halt Trump's commencement of the border wall construction between the two nations.

Despite Mexico's obligatory ties with the United States, from the Iranian state's perspective, it will always be preferable for Mexico to have a leftist president when it comes to reaching agreements with Iran.

Regarding the second question, fieldwork conducted by this author involved consulting individuals from various sectors of Mexican society. The responses tended to align with a general lack of knowledge regarding Iran and its interests in Mexico. Only within academic circles were found more nuanced responses, which warned of Iran's soft power strategy in the country. In other sectors, there was little familiarity with HispanTV or a comprehensive understanding of Iran's situation.

While it is commonly believed that Iranian soft power did not directly influence AMLO's electoral victory, there's recognition that the narrative promoted by Iran and Russia is resonating in certain sectors, fostering a greater inclination towards leftist proposals that have never governed Mexico before.

15.3. Peru

Peru's international path has largely revolved around agreements forged with the United States, resulting in minimal contact with Iran. Currently, Lima lacks an Iranian embassy, and it is Peru's ambassador to Turkey assuming responsibility for matters concerning Peru's interests in Tehran.

The impact of the Shining Path terrorist organization left an indelible mark in Peru, which distanced many citizens from communist proposals. Although the ideological position of President Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) remained in a "progressive" line, it was in a moderate position. However, a radical shift in public opinion brought the trade union leader Pedro Castillo to power after the 2021 elections.

What events unfolded in Peru that resulted in the victory of the most vindictive leftist candidate at the elections? Could media persuasion from Iran and Russia have played a role in this case as well?

Pedro Castillo's triumph stemmed from a series of internal factors that enabled the consolidation of the left behind a unified candidate. Weariness among the popular sectors, coupled with the ongoing involvement of their leaders in corruption scandals, provided Castillo with the requisite support for victory. It is crucial to evaluate whether the Iranian narrative, disseminated through various channels of the Latin American left, might have also influenced the sentiments of these popular sectors.

Sebastien Adins and Milred Rooney highlight the influence of Russian soft power in Peru through Russia Today (RT). As mentioned earlier, both HispanTV and RT uphold a similar editorial stance and share the common goal of bolstering the presence of progressive governments in Latin America. Consequently, it can be inferred that Iranian and Russian soft power played a role in shaping the leftist narrative that ultimately bolstered Pedro Castillo's presidential candidacy in Peru.

During the 2021 electoral process, HispanTV supported candidate Castillo and celebrated his victory. However, this support became even more apparent in the months following when his impeachment process commenced. Headlines during this time included: "Enough Abuses! Pedro Castillo Denounces Boluarte as a 'Usurper'" (December 12, 2022), "Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia Express Solidarity With Castillo" (December 13, 2022), "Pedro Castillo Demands Freedom: Calls It Political Revenge" (December 28, 2022), and "Dina The Assassin! Chants Erupt in Peru One Year After Castillo's Ousting" (December 7, 2023).

15.4. Chile

For the first time since the restoration of democracy in Chile in 1990, a candidate from outside the traditional center-right and center-left political

blocs emerged victorious in the 2021 elections. Gabriel Boric's ascent followed two tumultuous years marked by intense street protests. It has already been highlighted how HispanTV's coverage of these marches and demonstrations played a fundamental role. In this instance, the Chilean population was rallying against the conservative President Sebastián Piñera, presenting a significant opportunity for left-wing forces to channel this discontent.

To this end, the option endorsed by HispanTV was to support Eduardo Artés, the leader of the left-wing revolutionary party Unión Patriótica (UPA).¹ However, Artés only garnered 1.5% of the votes in the first round, prompting the Iranian channel to rethink its strategy.

The examination of the news articles published by HispanTV in the weeks leading up to the elections reveals the unwavering support extended to Artés, evidenced by headlines like "Unión Patriótica Proposes an Anti-Imperialist Government in Chile" (October 31, 2021). This was followed by criticism aimed at Gabriel Boric, accusing him of adhering to the US neoliberal model that sparked the social outbreak of 2019.

In the second round, the right-wing option represented by José Antonio Kast faced off against the "progressive" Gabriel Boric, who became HispanTV's new candidate. However, despite Boric's alignment with a new proposal grounded in progressive principles, he did not fully embody the radical profile that had been championed by the Iranian television channel in Chile.

In this scenario, while the radical proposition backed by HispanTV failed to gain widespread support, the Iranian message tailored for Chilean society could resonate with the popular demands advocating for a proposal aligned with the aspirations of the new generations within the left.

After his election, President Boric has opted for moderate rhetoric. Additionally, he has demonstrated opposition to the Venezuelan government and has even engaged in verbal disputes with the Nicaraguan President, Daniel Ortega, who is considered one of the Latin American icons by HispanTV.

Therefore, HispanTV did not have a direct impact on Gabriel Boric's triumph, but, once again, its narrative contributed to the revolutionary ideas permeating the population and garnering majority support for an alternative "progressive" political option.

16. Conclusions

The Iranian nuclear program presented a significant challenge for the Tehran government, especially given the widespread rejection by the international community. The imposed sanctions compelled Iran to search for new alliances, a task proving futile in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. In this context, forging ties with Venezuela through OPEC enabled Iran to contemplate the prospect of improving relations with Latin America. This endeavor required the adoption of a warm and diplomatic approach, portraying Iran as a nation aligned with Latin American interests. To achieve this goal, Iran focused on crafting a narrative that resonated with global issues, fostering a common ground with leftist political factions across Latin America. The rhetoric centered around anti-American sentiment and the concept of the Western Empire managed to infiltrate certain sectors of Latin American society, facilitating the proliferation of a soft power initiative. This effort propelled Iran to forge alliances and garner significance in numerous countries across the Western Hemisphere.

It became evident that an effective soft power strategy demanded substantial investment to effectively convey the Iranian message. In this regard, the cultural initiatives spearheaded by the embassies fell short of achieving desired objectives. Consequently, following the precedent set

¹ Unión Patriótica (UPA) was an electoral coalition that brought together extreme left-wing parties. The poor results obtained in the 2021 elections led to its dissolution.

by Russia and China, Iran opted to establish a Spanish-language television channel to broadcast its narrative round the clock, aiming to bolster its influence. President Ahmadinejad himself made it explicit during the channel's inauguration that HispanTV would serve as an ideological instrument. Subsequently, a sophisticated infrastructure was implemented to present the Iranian perspective on global realities and to persuade millions with its narrative

The scenario described above confirms Iran's intentions in Latin America and how, over time, the Persian government's objectives have been realized in certain countries. It is important to avoid generalizations and that there are nations like Ecuador, Uruguay, or Argentina that have undergone recent political shifts in the opposite direction. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that in those countries where the far-left had previously held marginal influence, a shift has occurred, enabling progressive agendas to triumph in elections.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that numerous social, economic, and political factors play into this process. Yet, it is crucial not to overlook Iran's persuasive ability and ongoing efforts, coupled with the endeavors of Russia and China. Together, they have bolstered a narrative opposing capitalism and Western imperialism, which has resonated deeply within broad segments of Latin American society, thereby fortifying support for leftist political alternatives.

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