

Venezuela's Mystery Plane Shows Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

On 8 June, a large Boeing 747 of suspicious origin was grounded in Buenos Aires, where Argentine authorities seized the crew's passports. The plane belongs to Venezuela's state-owned Emtrasur Cargo airline, a subsidiary of Conviasa, which Iran's sanctioned Mahan Air sold to Venezuela one year ago. The mystery surrounding the cargo plane hints at Iran's strategic penetration of Latin America through a mix of commercial and military activities. According to one of Argentina's leading media outlets *Infobae*, the aircraft stopped in Mexico to load auto parts, then made several trips throughout South America, including Venezuela, Paraguay, and eventually Argentina before authorities grounded it. Cordoba's leading newspaper, *Diario Cordoba*, posits that the passenger manifest, which was exceptionally large, holds clues as to the plane's true purpose. The paperwork shows that the pilot of the plane was a known member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Qud's Force, Captain Gholamreza Ghasemi. Further, speculation is rife that at least one passenger departed the plane before it arrived in Argentina, when the plane was forced to make an emergency landing in Cordoba after bad weather in Buenos Aires caused it to avert its landing there. If Iran is ferrying

security operatives and sanctioned individuals from its elite security forces to Latin America by cargo and civilian airliners, posing as either passengers or crew members, this represents a grave security threat. In 1992 and 1994, Argentina suffered devastating terrorist attacks on a Jewish community center and the Israeli Embassy. In Argentina, it has been suspected for years that Iran and Hezbollah have a connection to these attacks.

Argentina's Justice Ministry is trying to establish why Iranians came among the crew of the Venezuelan airline that was officially supposed to transport auto parts from Mexico to Argentina, and to see if there are elements that support the hypothesis that the Iranian pilot is indeed linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard.



A Venezuelan plane from the state-owned airline Conviasa at Simón Bolívar Airport in Caracas.

Source: Wilfredor via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Conviasa_plane_in_Maiquetia_Airport.jpg

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Source: “El avión con tripulantes iraníes encendió las alarmas de toda la región hace cuatro semanas (The plane with Iranian crew set off alarms throughout the region four weeks ago),” *Diario Cordoba* (Cordoba's leading daily newspaper), 14 June 2022. <https://titulares.ar/el-avion-con-tripulantes-iranies-encendio-las-alarmas-de-toda-la-region-hace-cuatro-semanas/>

The international alarms over the flights of a plane manned by Iranians and Venezuelans in the Southern Cone began to ignite four weeks ago throughout the region...[Argentina] received a notice that it is a company and therefore an aircraft that was sanctioned by the United States Department of the Treasury and that its crew members were members of the Al-Quds Force, the revolutionary force of Iran, whom the United States has been on a terrorism list.

Source: “EMTRASUR: la empresa fantasma venezolana que vuela con un solo avión bajo la sombra iraní (EMTRASUR: the Venezuelan ghost company that flies with a single plane under the Iranian shadow),” *Infobae* (one of Argentina's leading outlets, generally viewed as center-left politically), 19 June 2022. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2022/06/19/emtrasur-la-empresa-fantasma-venezolana-que-vuela-con-un-solo-avion-bajo-la-sombra-irani/>

Paraguayan Intelligence Minister Esteban Aquino assured this Friday that Gholamreza Ghasemi, the pilot of the plane held in Buenos Aires, has ties to the Quds Force. Argentina's Justice Ministry is trying to establish why Iranians came among the crew of the Venezuelan airline that was officially supposed to transport auto parts from Mexico to Argentina, and to see if there are elements that support the hypothesis that the Iranian pilot is indeed linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard.



FANGS OF THE LONE WOLF

by Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau

Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.