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Argentina's government and its Jewish community expressed satisfaction when international police agency Interpol voted to approve arrest warrants for five prominent Iranians and one Lebanese citizen in connection with the 1994 bombing of the Jewish center Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA). The Iranian government has subsequently called for international arrest warrants for five Argentines, including a federal judge who failed to convict previous defendants in the case (see NotiSur, 2004-09-17) for calumny against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The 1994 bombing killed 85 people and wounded 300, making it the worst terrorist attack in Argentine history. Interpol's General Assembly endorsed an executive-committee decision from March 2007 to issue the "red notices" for Hezbollah member Imad Fayez Mughniyah, former Iranian intelligence minister Ali Fallahian, Mohsen Rabbani, Ahmad Reza Asghari, former commander of the QUDS Force Ahmad Vahidi, and former commander of the Revolutionary Guard Mohsen Rezai, according to a statement on the Interpol Web site.

The warrants were suspended while the National Central Bureau of Tehran appealed the executive-committee finding. Rabbani and Ashgari were officials at the Iranian Embassy in Argentina. Tehran objected to the vote, calling the investigation flawed and saying the US and Israel were using Interpol to try to brand Iran a terrorist state. Red notices mean the individuals are placed on an international watch list for extradition to Argentina, which requested the notices in November for the alleged role of the accused in the worst terrorist attack on a Jewish target outside Israel since World War II.

The general assembly of Interpol voted 78 to 14 to issue the notices, with 26 abstentions. The red notices come after a November 2006 order by federal Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral to issue a warrant for the arrest of former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), former Iranian minister of foreign affairs Ali Akbar Velayati, and seven other former Iranian officials (see NotiSur, 2006-11-03).

In a statement at the time, Iran said the accusation were "baseless" and uncorroborated. In March, Interpol withdrew three warrants, among them those for the two top politicians, keeping in place the remaining arrest warrants. Argentine authorities accuse Iranian officials of having masterminded the bombing, which they say was carried out by the Shia radical movement Hezbollah, based in Lebanon.

In 2004, a court in Argentina had cleared five men accused of involvement in the AMIA bombing. The defendants, four former police officers and an alleged car thief, had been called the "local connection" by Argentine journalists. Prosecutors argued they were part of a car-theft ring that
delivered the vehicle that was then rigged with explosives outside the offices of AMIA in Buenos Aires.

The attack was the second bombing targeting Jews in Argentina. Two years earlier, a blast destroyed the Israeli Embassy, killing 29 people, a case that also remains unsolved. Argentine and world Jewish groups praise vote "The Interpol vote demonstrates what can be achieved when politics is left at the door and law enforcement is permitted to make its own determinations," said Ronald Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress. The World Jewish Congress is a diplomatic arm that represents Jewish communities in over 80 countries.

Argentina welcomed the decision and rejected the Iranian claims that the vote had been politicized. "This shows that even after 13 years have passed, one can fight for justice with the tools that the law provides to fight terrorism," Argentina's chief prosecutor Alberto Nisman said after the vote. Iran's officialdom took the opposite view.

"Politics overruled the rule of justice. It was not a vote for justice, it was a political vote," the director of the international law department of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alireza Deihim told the press. There are serious questions about the global politics surrounding the case, with the administration of US President George W. Bush pushing for stronger sanctions against the Iranian government.

Critics of the Bush administration have accused it of trying to expand its war in Iraq across the border to Iran. Some conjecture that the Bush administration may use Argentina's tensions with Iran to justify further hostile actions against the country. In September, Argentine President Nestor Kirchner, in his last address to the UN General Assembly before leaving office, raised the issue of Iran's cooperation in the bombing. In the meantime, the government of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been making deals and garnering allies among the more leftist governments of Latin America.

In September, Ahmadinejad appeared with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and the two presidents praised each other as "anti-imperialists" while Iran promised US$1 billion of investment into Venezuela. The Iranian president also visited Bolivia and has made deals with Nicaragua and Cuba (see NotiCen, 2007-06-07 and 2007-11-08).

**Iran issues warrants for five Argentines**

Iranian courts issued arrest orders against five Argentines a week after the Interpol vote, claiming the five had made calumnious statements against Iran. They included Judge Juan Jose Galeano, the judge who failed to get convictions in the earlier trials, former interior minister Carlos Corach, AMIA President Ruben Beraja, and two prosecutors in the case, Eamon Mullen and Jose Barbaccia.

Undersecretary of the prosecutor's office of Iran Yadollah Alizadeh said, "Those five citizens are accused of making attempts against the external security of Iran, baseless incriminations, bribing opponents of the Islamic republic outside the country, taking false testimony, and launching a media propaganda campaign against the Iranian state." Alizadeh said the accused should report to the Teheran Department of Justice and, if they did not, Iran would demand their arrest from Interpol."
AMIA president Luis Grynwald said, "I do not think Interpol will consider Iran's request. The AMIA case is an issue for the Argentine justice system. If the officials mentioned are culpable of something, Argentina has to take charge of judging them."

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