

Argentina charges US interference in crisis over prosecutor's death

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The political crisis precipitated by the mysterious January 18 death of Alberto Nisman has continued to deepen after a mass march called by fellow prosecutors and backed by the government's right-wing opponents drew large crowds into the streets of Buenos Aires Wednesday to mark one month since the Argentine federal prosecutor was found with a fatal bullet wound to his head.

Supporters of the government of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner denounced the march as a maneuver of the political right and forces within the state apparatus aimed at bringing about a "soft coup," while charging that foreign governments—particularly Washington—have attempted to manipulate the case to pursue their own geostrategic interests.

A week before his death, Nisman had announced that he would accuse Fernandez de Kirchner, Foreign Minister Hector Timerman and other officials as well as employees of intelligence services of making an illegal and secret agreement with the government of Iran to protect Iranian "spies" who were allegedly involved in the 1994 suicide car bombing at the Argentina Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building that killed 85 people. Nisman had produced a 290-page report about the case, and among papers found in his apartment were requests for criminal warrants against both Fernandez de Kirchner and Timerman.

While there is no evidence that Nisman was murdered—forensic reports on the bullet's path are consistent with an act of suicide—there is widespread skepticism in Argentine society that Nisman took his own life. This is not only a matter of the timing of his death, but also long experience with political and judicial corruption and impunity for state criminals, going back to those who carried out the mass killings, disappearances and torture under the former military

dictatorship.

While undoubtedly such sentiments found expression in the February 18 demonstration, dubbed a "march of silence," those who played the key role in organizing it are themselves fully complicit in this corruption and impunity, including the federal attorneys, veterans themselves of cover-ups and frame-ups of workers and the left.

On the eve of Wednesday's march, a White House spokesman stated that the Obama administration is "concerned" about the issues arising from Nisman's death and is continuing to "monitor closely" the events in Argentina.

Florida Senator Marco Rubio and other congressional Republicans have called for an international investigation into Nisman's death and for sanctions against Argentina unless it severs ties with Iran. Nisman had ties to Rubio, who invited him to testify before a Senate panel, before the visit was barred by the Argentine government.

In a letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Timerman declared that Argentina would not tolerate being turned into a "theater for operations of politics, intelligence or, even worse, more serious actions, because of conflicts that are completely unconnected with its history."

This rhetoric, however, was belied by Timerman's proposal in the same letter that the US raise the issue of the 1994 bombing in its talks with Iran on the latter's nuclear program, effectively subordinating Argentina to US imperialist maneuvers with Iran.

Nisman was appointed in 2004 by President Nestor Kirchner (the current president's late husband) to head up the investigation of the 1994 bombing and had produced documents that charged the president and other government officials with cover-up and a secret

agreement with Iran to impede the investigation and protect the alleged perpetrators.

Nisman collaborated in the investigation with SIDE (now renamed SI), a notorious and powerful intelligence and secret police agency that played a role in the savage repression of the working class and left-wing youth in Argentina, as well as in the infamous “Plan Condor,” collaborating with the CIA in chasing down exiled political opponents of the military fascist dictatorships in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. Nisman worked with SIDE chief Jaime Antonio Stiuso, who had been with the agency since 1972.

Fernandez de Kirchner has accused Stiuso of directing and manipulating Nisman (and perhaps murdering him) for his own political purposes. Stiuso is now in hiding. According to the Madrid daily *El País*, Nisman came forward with his indictment—widely described as a political document—right after Stiuso was fired from SIDE last December and amid fears that a prosecutor aligned with the government would replace him.

That SIDE and elements like Stiuso continued to wield power within the state more than three decades after the end of the military dictatorship is a damning indictment of all the civilian governments that followed, including that of Fernandez de Kirchner. All of them bowed to the repressive apparatus, while also relying upon it to defend the state and both foreign and Argentine capital against the working class.

The intimate involvement of foreign intelligence agencies in the case is undeniable. These included the Israeli Mossad, as well as the US CIA and FBI. Nisman and SIDE worked in close contact with these agencies—in SIDE’s case before and after the AMIA bombing.

While the Lebanese Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, the group had largely been dissolved by this point. Both it and the AMIA attack suspiciously coincided with negotiations between Argentina and Iran on a resumption of nuclear cooperation (Argentina had suspended shipments of nuclear material a few months before the embassy bombing). There are suspicions that the bombings were carried out with the aim of disrupting Argentine-Iranian relations.

During the course of the AMIA bombing

investigation it came to light that SIDE had received warnings from the Brazilian intelligence service, as well as Argentine consulates in Milan and Beirut, that an attack on AMIA was in the works and allowed it to happen. In the aftermath of these bombings, however, SIDE (discredited by its role under the dictatorship, and having suffered substantial cuts in its personnel and budget) was reconfigured as an “anti-terrorist” agency, assuming greater powers with restored funds.

There exists ample evidence of the continuing presence of anti-Semitic elements in the Argentine armed forces and police, and in SIDE itself. Those elements, which were given free rein under military rule, now sense a change in the political climate. The Nisman crisis has brought out of the woodwork these openly fascist elements (in recent days, leaflets were brazenly distributed in Jewish neighborhoods in Buenos Aires that read “the only good Jew is a dead Jew; Nisman = good Jew,” while Nazi symbols were painted on the walls of buildings in the area). Argentina has the sixth largest Jewish population in the world.

Right-wing opposition parties, meanwhile, are blocking legislation to abolish SIDE and create a new intelligence agency.

There is a parallel between SIDE and the American CIA. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the US were carried out by persons known to US intelligence, just as SIDE had known about the impending AMIA bombing. The political establishment is, in both cases, dominated by the intelligence apparatus and determined to prevent any real accounting for these events.



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