

**TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA -- (House of Representatives -
November 05, 2007)**

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from New York (Mr. Serrano) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SERRANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about an issue that troubles me quite a bit and I think should trouble a lot of the American people. Certainly it should concern Members of Congress.

A resolution was passed this afternoon by voice vote dealing with the alleged involvement and behavior of the President of Iran, therefore, the Government of Iran, in Latin America and supporting, according to this resolution, terrorist activities in Latin America.

Let me briefly read the opening statement of this resolution, the title, if you will: expressing concern relating to the threatening behavior of the Iranian regime and the activities of terrorist organizations sponsored by that regime in Latin America.

Well, just to deal with language itself, we know that when our government calls another government a regime, it is not saying anything positive about it. It is, in fact, confronting it in some way. But I think that as unnoticed as this went by, as I said it was passed on a voice vote, as unnoticed that this went by, this puts us in a situation, the Congress, the American people, our Nation, on a road, on a path to a very dangerous situation in the future, perhaps in the near future.

We all know how concerned the administration is and how concerned some Members of Congress are about the possibility that Iran could be involved in activities that would be hurtful to us. I want to correct that. I think all Members of Congress are concerned about that possibility.

But I think we are also concerned about the fact, many of us, that there seems to be a drumbeat towards war with Iran, a drumbeat that says, basically, some of the same things that were said when we were taken off to war against Iraq. Just about everything that was told to us at that time happened not to be true. History will tell whether, in fact, we were lied to, or whether the information was so bad that the administration had no choice but to pass that on to us thinking that it was correct.

But there are many who feel that we were lied to. Again, history will have to deal with that.

My concern is that this resolution today moves away from just a concern about the behavior of the Government in Iran and begins to suggest that there are neighbors of ours, and, yes, I say neighbors, because that's what the Latin American people are, neighbors of ours, that could be involved in this behavior, behavior which would be dangerous to the United States, behavior which we all should be concerned about, behavior that, perhaps, would lead us to get involved in Latin America in a way that we haven't been involved for a long, long time.

But I think in order to understand where we are with this issue, we also have to have, I think, an understanding of how history repeats itself, how some things that we are hearing now we have heard before. For close to 50 years now, we have had a very strong lobbying effort in this country against a Cuban Government. The so-called anti-Castro lobby has been very strong, and that lobby has been very influential in getting many Members of Congress and Presidents, present and past, to feel that the only path towards changes in Cuba is to continuously attack and confront the Cuban Government. To the dismay of many people, I am sure, and with all due respect to many people, it is no secret that for the most part that lobby, this effort, has come out of anti-Castro groups who, for the most part, live in the State of Florida.

Well, something very interesting has happened in the last few years. As Latin America has elected leftist-leaning leaders, people who propose to put forth a modern-day socialism, as they call it, 21st-century socialism, but people who have been elected and reelected as they have emerged, they have decided that it would not be improper for them as leaders of those countries to have a relationship with the Cuban Government.

Well, that upsets the same people who have been upset with the Cuban Government. The fact that some new governments in Latin America would now be friendly to the Government in Cuba would upset these folks.

Our policy towards Cuba has been heavily influenced by this anti-Castro movement. I can't tell you how many times in the 17 years that I have been in Congress and have tried to change that policy. I have been told by Members of Congress on both sides, Democrats and Republicans, liberals

and conservatives, I have been told by them, I agree with you, you are right with this policy having to change.

But I think we have to continue it, and most of them will tell you, because the lobbying effort, out of a couple of communities in this country is so strong, that I really don't want to face that. Right on the House floor they have told me, I don't want to face that, I will just go along with this policy, as outdated as this may be, as inefficient as that may be, because it hasn't changed anything in Cuba, not that we should necessarily be changing things in another country. But now we find that those same folks have now picked new targets.

Chief among those targets, top of the list, is the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who has over and over again shown his friendship to President Castro of Cuba, and that irritates the folks who support ending Mr. Castro's stay in Cuba. Those folks then have started to say the same things that they have said for years about Mr. Castro.

Now, the fact of life is that the Cuban Government, the system in Cuba, and the system in Venezuela, for instance, are totally different, totally different. But not to those folks who simply would want to get rid of one. They now feel that they have a target which is the President of Venezuela.

That target then, I think, leads us to situations like today, where a resolution presented here speaks of putting together all these groups who have one thing in common. They speak out against our government, they say things we don't like, and who happen to have been visited or received telephone calls or offers of help from Iran.

Now, Communist China, and I use that title, that phrase, that word, so we understand what we are talking about, are involved in the economy of every country in Latin America; but you don't see a resolution on the House floor condemning Communist China for being involved in Latin America.

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Why? Because they're a big trading partner of ours. And secondly, let's be

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honest, because there is no Chinese American lobby in this country influencing how we behave in Congress. And so we could deal with China every day and they could do whatever

they want in their country, and we will never say more than maybe say every so often, behave yourself.

And there are countries in the Middle East who treat their folks in ways that you could spend every day in Congress condemning them, but we won't do that because we have a relationship with them.

But nothing, and I say this with great admiration, nothing is as strong as the anti-Castro lobby, which has made it clear that the leadership in Latin America that is friendly to Mr. Castro must pay a price, and one of the prices you pay is to lump them together as this hate group that is now going to be involved in terrorist activities in Latin America.

We have democratically elected leaders in Latin America that have these friendly relations with the Cuban Government. That doesn't matter to us that these folks were elected and re-elected. As long as they are friendly to Cuba, Miami hates them. And as long as Miami hates them, then Congress must hate them too.

So when you hear comments about Chavez, when you hear comments about Evo Morales, the President of Bolivia, when you hear comments about President Correa in Ecuador, understand, when you hear these comments, or about any one of the other left-leaning presidents in Latin America, that you're basically hearing from the same playbook, the comments that you heard about Cuba for all these years.

But please understand something, that you are not hearing direct attacks on those governments; you're still hearing an attack on the Cuban Government. It is just being played out in this new scenario called the other countries in Latin America.

Now, it is true that we have, or they have elected leaders in Latin America that are not happy with the U.S. Government and that words have been strong at times towards us. But some of this rhetoric has a history behind it.

While our country paid a great deal of attention to Asia, Europe and the Middle East, we neglected Latin America. That is a fact. That is not Congressman Serrano from the Bronx, New York, just making those comments to sound nice at this time of night. That's a fact. We neglected Latin America, and they suffered, and still do, through some very difficult periods.

And during the Cold War, it was really interesting. We would go to Latin America and we would say, General So-and-

So, Senor, do you support communism in the Soviet Union or do you support our style of government? And those generals would say, oh, no; we support your style. We would say, great, you're our friend. We'll see you in a couple of years. And meanwhile, they mistreated their folks; they ransacked the country. But it didn't matter to us because they were not for communism. They were not to the left of the political spectrum. They were not for socialism.

During that time, however, we would say something very positive. Every so often we would kind of knock them on the shoulder and say democracy is the most important thing. Nothing is as important as democracy.

Well, you know something? They've tried it all in Latin America. They tried military dictatorships. The people didn't try it. They were the victims of it, and it didn't work. Then they tried regular dictatorships, if there's such a thing different from a military dictatorship. But it didn't work either. The people suffered, but the ones who tried it didn't work. Then they tried something new for Latin America in many cases, new to some countries, new to many countries. They tried democracy. They elected folks. But they elected folks who were very much tied to international corporate interests, who got elected, many in questionable elections, and then neglected the people, neglected the people. And the people found out that they had elected people, they had done everything they were asked to do, and they were getting poorer and poorer every day. So what have they done in the last couple of years? They've elected left-of-center candidates in Chile, in Argentina, in Ecuador, in Bolivia, in Venezuela. And these folks have been, and are, revolutionaries. They, themselves, claim to be revolutionaries, and that, again, we hear that word, that upsets us. We forget that this great system we have here was created through a revolution against the British. But we were the last ones to use that word in a way that we liked it. Now anybody who calls himself a revolutionary we get upset about. But these people are revolutionaries. They're trying something new in Latin America. Embarrassing as it may seem, it is new to many countries in Latin America, this whole notion that the person at the bottom, the person who's been suffering for years, the indigenous people, the darker skinned people, that they would now have an opportunity to have something better.

Now, and this is important what I just mentioned about the fact that in Latin America, the darker skinned folks

are beginning to feel that they have a stake in their system.

When Secretary of State Colin Powell, one of the greatest Americans, left the administration at the last, the end of the last term, he came before our Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and I was the ranking member at that time. And he said to us something very important when he was talking about Latin America. He said, the big change in Latin America, and what we Americans need to understand, now he didn't say it was good. He didn't say it was bad. He didn't say it was a problem for us. He just said it was something that was happening in Latin America, that we as Americans have to pay attention to. He said, those folks are beginning to elect people who look like themselves. Now, that's a heck of a statement by a very intelligent man who has a good understanding of the world. I don't know if that upsets some of us, but I think it does upset some folks in this country and throughout the hemisphere, that countries that are composed primarily mostly of indigenous people and people of color have now decided to elect people who look like themselves, people who come from them. And when they decide to make changes that are very dramatic and, yes, very revolutionary, we get upset because it doesn't serve the corporate interests of a lot of American corporations.

So Hugo Chavez in Venezuela decides that he's going to revolutionize the way Venezuela behaves. He came to the Bronx. He visited the Bronx. He spoke to us and he said something very interesting. He told us who he was. And you never hear about this in this country. He told us he was a kid, very poor, who didn't have shoes until he was a teenager, walked barefoot, who wanted only one dream in life, to become a major league baseball pitcher. And he was pretty good. But from where he lived, to be seen by major league scouts, he had to go to Caracas. And he was told that the only way to get to Caracas was to join the Army. So he joined the Army. He jokes that it was the worst mistake his country ever made, letting him join the Army, because when he began to travel with the Army he noticed something very interesting of Venezuela. He noticed that people who looked like him were very poor, and other folks who didn't look like him were living in a country with a lot of oil and a lot of

money. He also noticed that not all neighborhoods were like his. He thought all of Venezuela was like his neighborhood, and it wasn't. It had serious pockets of

serious money. So he began to grow a conscience about that; became a military leader, eventually led him into politics. He got elected. And when he got elected he immediately set out to change the way Venezuela behaves. And the opposition to him knows that. That's why they all admit that he's so popular within his country, by the folks who are at the bottom.

But, you know, I get to watch Spanish television from Latin America on my cable system in the Bronx, and you know, as tough as we are in American politics, some of the stuff you hear about President Chavez from the owners of these stations who open up their morning programming by reminding people that their President has curly hair and is dark skinned, as if that was a sin, but it's such a revolutionary thing that has happened in Latin America that some people still can't get over it. So he's an idiot. He's crazy. He's corrupt.

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But even the opposition, at times, in attempting to say something against him, really says dumb things. I wish I had the name of the person, although I wouldn't use it on the House floor, but during the last elections in Venezuela when the polls indicated that President Chavez was at 62 percent of the vote, one of the New York Times reporters, I think it was, asked this leader of the opposition, Why do you think he's so popular? And the gentleman said, and this has to be the dumbest statement ever made by a politician in the history of the world, the gentleman said, You would be popular too if you were always building schools and hospitals for the poor. Well, to that I say, what American teenagers taught us to say, duh. I mean, isn't that the reason why you elect people to take care of those in the society who need help amongst others? Because you don't play class warfare. So they're saying that because he's building hospitals and because he's building schools, he's very popular. Well, yeah, Mr. Opposition. Why didn't you try that when you were in power for the last couple of hundred years to do some of that?

Now, these leaders in Latin America that we attack, it's important to know how they got to that point of being the leaders of these countries. For instance, in this resolution, it says, whereas in January of 2007, the President of Iran made his second visit to Central and South America in 5 months to meet with Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela, to visit Daniel Ortega, President

of Nicaragua, and to attend the inauguration of Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador.

Well, if we're going to be technical about this, the fact is he went there for the President's inauguration, something we all did. I mean, every country in the world sent a representative. I imagine our Ambassador was there. If he wasn't, he should have been there because this was an elected President of Ecuador.

When you make those visits, as our President does, and I commend him for it, you go and you take the time that you're in that country and you visit neighboring countries if you don't get a chance to meet with everybody. That's something you do.

But we attack these people in this resolution that we passed today, this, in my opinion, dangerous resolution, and that's why we're here today. We're here today because Congress passed a resolution today condemning Iran's involvement in Latin America and suggesting that these progressive leftist semi, if you want to call them, socialists in Latin America have a bond going with the President of Iran to create havoc for us and to fund terrorist organizations.

But there's something we forget. Let's look at Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua. He was elected in a free and fair election, recognized by world organizations. As part of the Central American peace plan, Ortega's Sandinista government agreed to internationally monitored democratic elections in 1990.

Now, this guy we don't like submitted himself to elections in 1990 and he lost, and peacefully, after having won a revolution, peacefully turned his government over to Violetta Chamorro, who was the victor, with our support, heavily with our support, because all the arguments in those days about how much money we sent into her campaign.

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Now, can you imagine if somebody from another country sent money to one of our Presidential campaigns, another government, what we would do with that candidate in this country? But we do that.

Ortega ran for President in 1996 and lost, ran for democratically provided elections in 2001 and lost. Because he came in second place both times, however, Nicaraguan law gave him a seat in the national assembly where he has

served as an opposition leader. Then he ran for President again in 2006 and won. Now, shouldn't that alone make us want to go to Nicaragua or call him up and say, We asked you, we asked everybody in Latin America, to get elected. You ran four times and finally you got elected. Let's at least talk. No? We are on his case. In fact, we are linking him to terrorist organizations in this resolution.

Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, elected in free and fair elections January 15 of this year. He is a U.S.-trained economist. What does that mean? That he learned what he knows about what he wants to put in practice in Ecuador in American schools. So shouldn't we be applauding that? Shouldn't we be applauding the fact that he got elected democratically? He is Ecuador's eighth President in 10 years. The instability has been horrible. Maybe there could be stability now. We should be supportive of that. He defeated Alvaro Noboa, a wealthy banana magnate, in a run-off election held in 2006. Contrary to our predictions, he got 57 percent of the vote.

Now, the one that we attack the most, of course, is President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. Well, let's review this for a second. President Chavez has won elections in 1998, in 2000, and in 2006. In other words, he got elected in 1998. He then went out and had his coalition elect delegates to a constitutional convention. Those delegates wrote a new constitution that, and listen to this revolutionary idea, gave power to the poor and to the indigenous people. They changed the constitution to do that, and they put it before the people. The constitution was passed by the people. So I'd say that that is another referendum on Chavez. Then the new constitution said that he had to cut his 6-year term short and run right away. So he ran in 1998; then he had to run again in 2000.

Then in 2006 in between the opposition again with support from outside forces, a lot of them based right in the State of Florida, they held a referendum. He submitted himself to that referendum to be recalled as the President. He wins in 1998. He doesn't finish his full term. He goes again in 2000. But by 2004 they were ready to kick him out, the opposition. They hold a referendum. And he wins it big. The recall, he wins it big. In 1999, as I said, he won a referendum for a new constitution. And in 2005 his coalition of parties won election for the Parliament, for the Congress.

Now, here's the question I have: Didn't we tell Latin American countries to use the democratic process? Isn't

that what we always said was the bottom line? Everything else could be negotiable, we said at times. But democracy was the bottom line. Even when we didn't practice it, as I said before, we did say this is what you must do. Now I just read you three examples of people who have used the democratic system to reach their positions. So why are we attacking them continuously on the House floor? Once a month we get a resolution here attacking somebody in Latin America instead of getting close.

Now, what we don't understand is that this whole situation with Latin America's electing people who are left of center is because the people are tired of the poverty, tired of the pain, and they now have leaders who at least in what they have attempted to do up to now indicates that they want to balance off the wealth of those countries. Balance off.

We don't celebrate the fact that Hugo Chavez comes from poverty, reaches the presidency, and has been elected three times himself and his government another five times totaling eight elections since 1998. We don't celebrate the fact that in over close to 500 years, the people of Bolivia, a country mostly made up of indigenous people, what we call Indians, elected for the first time an Indian, Evo Morales. We don't celebrate that.

I felt so good when I saw this man take the oath of the presidency dressed in the native dress of his people. I thought it was a great day. Our comments right away were, what is he going to do with the gas industry? Well, he did what we expected. He told some of the gas companies this is a very poor country. We have a lot of natural resources here. We are going to start sharing some of those profits with the people. Oh, he's a communist. We have got to get rid of him. He's a problem. So now in this resolution we lump him together with the President of Iran. When you do that, you immediately make enemies of the American people and those people.

But you also make a very serious mistake, and this is perhaps the most important thing that we have to pay attention to. When you reject the electoral victories of these folks; when you don't celebrate the fact that people from the lower class, economic class,

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that people of darker skin of indigenous people are being elected; when you as the American Government, the greatest and largest government in the world, don't celebrate that

and, in fact, spend a lot of time trying to bring them down; when you don't do that, it is natural that you drive them to places where you don't want them to be.

Now, when you are a Member of Congress and you stand up in front of the House and people may watch you on TV, you are supposed to speak as exactly that. My problem, or my strength, is that I so often remind people that I grew up in a public housing project. And in the projects you have certain rules of behavior. And one is that if somebody is trying to do you in and that person is stronger and bigger than you, you go find someone who can help you confront that person. That's a fact of life for survival. Most Members of Congress, most American elected officials don't talk about the rule of the projects because they didn't grow in the projects. I am not saying that makes them worse than me, just different.

So I use that as a point of understanding. Again, I grew up in the South Bronx in a public housing project. If you came after me, if you came after my mother, my sister, my cousin, you were my enemy.

Well, when President Chavez came to the U.N., our country was outraged. And I was not happy with what he said. He called President Bush the devil, and that was enough for us to go to war. But let's talk about a little history now. There was a coup attempt on President Chavez by members of the military and members of the elite. All of Latin America, most of Europe, some folks in the Middle East all got up and said you can't do that. You can't do that. That man was elected. He's got to serve his term. What did the United States say? Well, at the White House some folks said publicly he brought it on himself. No, you can't say that, he brought it on himself. You don't bring on a coup against your government.

In Latin America they said that our fingerprints were all over that attempted coup; that if we actually did not participate in it, we gave aid to it through our comments and said it was okay. Now, when I met President Chavez when he came to visit the Bronx, he spoke to us for a couple of hours. He's famous for speaking a couple of hours. He told us about all the things I have mentioned here. But he said when they took him out of the presidential palace, the ``White House,`` if you will, took him up to the mountains, he knew he was going to die. He knew he was going to get killed. And you can imagine what is going through his head because he doesn't know what is happening in Washington. He found out later that what was happening to him and when he

thought he was going to get killed, he thought the whole world was outraged.

He found out later that Washington was basically saying we'll figure it out. And we didn't say anything when the guy who took over for him momentarily suspended the Congress, suspended the constitution, and that's when the people reacted to it. Of course, Chavez came back because two things happened. One was the folks from the mountain side, the poor folks, the dark-skin folks, the indigenous people found out and they started running to the city and demanding to have their President back. The people won, the power didn't. But we didn't say anything.

And he tells us that when he goes there, a young soldier, he's sitting in a room and opens the door and he hears the rifle load up and he thinks he's going to get shot right there, and the soldier says, If our President is killed, we will all be killed here. And that did a turnaround where the young soldiers told the older soldiers, We're not going back to those days. This man was elected and he has to serve his term.

Now, let's go back a second to my focal point of growing up in the projects. They tried to kill the man and he came back into power. He thinks a few people were involved in it. He calls our President the devil as a representative of the country that didn't help him during that time. We don't appreciate having our President called the devil. We don't encourage that and we all denounced it. But in the projects if you try to bump me off, the least I am going to call you is the devil. In fact, the ramifications may be even more dangerous. So I think it was really a light comment compared to what he felt was happening to him.

Now, there is another issue here that has been discussed a lot. We all heard about how recently President Chavez closed a TV station in Venezuela, and we were outraged. Nobody likes to do that. But what we were not told here is the history behind that. I'm not suggesting it was a good move. If I had been his adviser, I would have said leave it alone. But do you know who was on in the middle of the attempted coup against President Chavez in the Venezuela equivalent of the White House? The owner of the TV station that lost its license a few months ago. He was there as part of the coup to overthrow this government.

Now, listen to me. I don't support most of the policies of President Bush. But if I heard that CBS, ABC, CNN, anyone tomorrow was involved in a coup against President

Bush, I would ask that their license not be renewed because that is not freedom of speech. That is violence against the government.

[Time: 23:15]

And you can't treat them any differently than you would treat someone. I would say we have to seriously consider not allowing them to continue in that role because they just attempted to overthrow a government by force.

Also, they refused to televise the coup. And when they did televise, they only televised the opposition; they never televised the people. The country never knew that Chavez was gone because they didn't want the people to know. And when he came back, they didn't know that either, although they had televised part in the middle of the coup because they were supposedly playing cartoons and movies on TV because they didn't want to support the government in any way. That is the truth behind that licensing situation.

Now, what is the danger in what we've done today? Today, we committed the mistake of allowing our emotions on the issue of Cuba to blind us into attacks on Latin American countries, blanket attacks on many countries. And in this resolution we make claims on issues that in no way can be proven.

We're suggesting that Iran is going to fund terrorist organizations in Latin America. These are some of the same folks that told us there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. How many of us have forgotten those words, ``weapons of mass destruction''? They also told us that Iraq was tied to al Qaeda. They also told us that Iraq helped al Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks. Even the White House has now admitted that most of that, if not all, was not true. So, I can't understand this desire to lump this together with Iran, present bad information, if not outright lies, and begin to move us towards a confrontation with Latin America at the same time we have confrontation with Iran.

But look at some of the silly things that the resolution says. It says, Whereas, at the Iranian Conference on Latin America, Iran announced that it would reopen embassies in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and send a representative to Bolivia. And what is wrong with that? Don't we want people to talk to each other? Don't we have relations with most of the countries of the world? But when Iran does it, just to reopen relations they had before, re-

establish, we get upset. Well, that's an acceptable action for a sovereign state.

Now, I spoke about the various leaders, and I neglected to remind us that the President of Bolivia was elected on December 18, 2005, with a record 85 percent of the Bolivian people voting in the elections. They were deemed by world organizations to be free and fair. He won a convincing victory, getting 54 percent of the vote, compared to 29 percent for his opposition. Although a lot of people were predicting that he would win, no one thought that he could win this big.

Now, here's another part of the resolution. And I leave it to the people watching or listening to this to try to figure out what this means, because I don't know what the crime is here. It says, Whereas, routine civilian airline flights have been established from Tehran, Iran directly into Caracas,

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Venezuela, and the Government of Venezuela has been found to be indiscriminate in the issuance of Venezuelan passports and other identifying documents to people coming on those flights. So, they're allowing people to fly directly to them, and they are allowing Iran to fly direct flights. Well, we have direct flights all over the world. What is the issue?

Now, here is the most dangerous one: Whereas, Iran and Hezbollah were involved in the two deadliest terrorist attacks in Argentina, and we all know that this is true, now they claim that Hezbollah is setting up in Latin America with the support of Iran. Well, my God, if that is true, why are we waiting until this particular resolution, which passed in what one could call the quickness of the afternoon without a vote, to bring up such a serious situation? If it's true that Hezbollah is involved in Latin America setting up bases, recruiting people, shouldn't we be outraged and really consider how to address that rather than just as a throw-away line in a resolution? This is so much more of this attempt to link Iran to Latin America.

And let me reach the last few minutes here by telling you why I think this is extremely dangerous.

It is pretty clear around here that we are beating the drum towards war with Iran. That's no longer an alarmed behavior. I'm not trying to alarm people into feeling nervous, but I think most American people are hearing a lot of what they heard before we went to Iraq. And you know

that Iraq has been a very, very difficult situation for us, and we don't know when we will be able to get out of Iraq. And now there is this drumbeat, both inside and outside the Congress, throughout the country, but coming from the government, from the White House, coming out of the President's office, coming out of the Vice President's office, that we have to somehow confront Iran. That's a problem all by itself. And it's a horrible problem that we could be discussing here for hours.

But my concern, and my reason for speaking on a resolution today, a resolution which was introduced primarily by Democrats, and I know this is not something we usually do, speak against members of our own party, but we can all be nervous about a situation because on both sides of the aisle people are marching forward to war with Iran.

So, now we link these other countries. What does that mean? Does that mean that we now have an excuse to go and try military action against Bolivia? against Argentina? against Ecuador? against Venezuela? Is it because, indeed, they've earned the right, if you will, of having us react that way, or is it because we're using Iran as an excuse to deal with other things we wanted to deal with in the first place, which is getting at these folks.

And so, I go back to my initial statement, that the same lobby group that has been directing our policy towards Cuba and preventing us from making changes in that policy, that same group has been intelligent enough, enabled enough to now direct our attention towards Latin American leftist leaders because they're friendly to Cuba, and what best way to get at them? To link them to Iran, the ugly country for us right now.

And I'm not suggesting, by the way, that we should not have some concerns, if not serious concerns, about the behavior of Iran. That's not the issue here. I don't want people tomorrow saying, oh, he was defending Iran. No. I'm defending no one. What I'm defending is the right of the Latin American people to make their own democratic choices, if you will, and that we will respect that. But by linking them, I have to ask the question, if we go after Iran, and we just finished saying this afternoon that these Latin American countries are tied into Iran's behavior, aren't we also giving ourselves the opportunity, the reason, the power to go after these countries, too? That's my concern.

Let me conclude by speaking to a subject that I know well. You don't have to live in Latin America to know how

Latin Americans feel about the United States or about American people. This may sound like a joke, it may even sound sarcastic, but it is honestly true. All you have to live is in southern Maryland, in northern Virginia, in D.C., in New York, in LA, in Houston, in Dallas, in any city, any suburb in this country that has the growing number of immigrants from Latin America, whether

documented or not, they're here for a reason. And if we were discussing immigration, I would tell you that they're here because they like this country. They want to work. They want to feed their families. But that is no different than how people in Latin America feel about us. To link them with a group of folks in the Middle East who have openly said, not all of them, but some, who have openly said that they don't like us, to link them to that is to make two horrible mistakes. One is to have bad information again put forth about a people who actually like us, and also, the worst mistake of all, to drive them into the arms of people we don't like. Because as I told you before, when you pick on someone and you're the toughest guy on the block, that person is going to have to find someone to help them out.

So, instead of reaching out to Latin America, we say to them, you're as bad as the other guy. And we hate the other guy, and we're going to eventually take action against the other guy, so you know what you can expect. And even if that's not our intent, it will only make them think that that is our intent, and they will have to try to drum up new relationships. Because they're not going to give into us, they're not going to leave office and say we'll go back to the days when the general ran the country.

Latin Americans, my friends, can be found in any city, any suburb, any neighborhood. And so many of them have such a close relationship to the people back home that they want to do nothing in this country to jeopardize the ability to continue to deal with their family back home. And their family back home will never allow any behavior in those countries that can hurt us. They need us and we need them.

And so, when you speak to Latin Americans in our communities, you never hear hatred of the United States as you do in some other countries. They are materially poor, yes, suspicious of America's intentions in their hemisphere, yes, but interested in making common cause with Hezbollah and other foreign movements to target American interests? Never. Let me repeat that. They would never team up with a terrorist organization against the United States.

They don't have anything against us of that nature. They just don't like our rhetoric and our indifference to them, but they're not going to team up with anybody to hurt us, because most of those countries have so many of their people living here that it would be like attacking another part of your neighborhood. Because to hurt the American interests would almost certainly hurt their own. Money that flows from here to there would be cut off from relatives. Those family ties of people living and working in the United States would be gone.

A broad cultural admiration for the U.S. have knit together places like Caracas, Quito, and New York. One of the ironies of the current immigration debate is how folks often evoke how immigration from Latin America is changing this country. What they forget is how that same phenomenon is changing Latin America, which, despite its general political rejection of this administration, is growing ever closer in its embrace of a Pan-American culture and a Pan-American economy.

[Time: 23:30]

For many thousands of people in Venezuela, Ecuador and Nicaragua, Americans are their cousins, their siblings and their children. They can be our greatest allies in the world if we don't continue to push them into the embrace of hostile regimes with foolish resolutions like this one.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't easy for me to decide to speak on this today. As I said, this resolution was presented by many Democrats, well-intentioned folks. I just see us going down a dangerous road here, a very dangerous road. If we have a problem with Iran, deal with that problem. Don't link the poor people of Latin America who have nothing against us.

We have tried to export democracy to Latin America, and I think finally it is working. But we don't like the results. We have tried to export capitalism, and in many ways what they do with each other by trading oil for doctors and oil for technology is capitalism at its best. I often joke, but profoundly so, I think,

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that we exported baseball to Latin America. I don't have to tell you how well that is doing in Latin America and doing right here. I am a Yankee fan. But just ask the Boston Red Sox how they feel about Latin American ballplayers and Latin American baseball.

So these folks don't dislike us. But they are going to be troubled tomorrow morning when they find out what we did here in Congress today. They are going to be troubled that we are linking them with people we hate and they don't want to be hated by us.

So I hope we can spend some time reviewing this, thinking about it, and perhaps understanding that in our desire to do what is right for us and to protect our great country, this country I love, this country in whose Army I served proudly, this country whose Congress I serve proudly, this country that I would give my life for, that as you love your country, you don't love it different from a child. When that child is not doing the right thing, you have to correct that child. And our country is wrong right now in its desire to treat Latin America with hate and disdain and to make of it something that it is not. They are our neighbors and our friends. We should treat them as such. We should extend our hand to them and tell them, you are our neighbor, you are our friends, you are, in fact, members of this family in more ways than one, and we are members of yours. Let's work together. Let's not show a lack of respect for each other.

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