

Argentinian government under fire over possible Iranian connection

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On January 18th, 2015, Argentina federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman was found dead in his apartment. While the police have called it a suicide, many people believe it was an assassination. Nisman was the lead investigator looking into the 1994 bombing of the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AIMA – a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires) that killed 85 people. The investigation has been plagued by incompetence and accusations of cover-ups over the two decades following the bombing, but Nisman was set to deliver charges against Argentina’s president for conspiring with Iran to cover up the perpetrators of the AMIA bombing just hours before he was found dead. Nisman’s death has turned into both a national cause and a political scandal that has caused the Argentinian government quite a bit of embarrassment.

Last Tuesday, Argentina Foreign Minister Hector Timerman publicly released a letter he had sent to United States Secretary of State John Kerry. In the letter, Timmerman asks Kerry to bring up the AMIA investigation with Iran during nuclear negotiations, hoping that Kerry will be able to persuade the Iranians to constructively participate in Argentina’s investigation into the bombing.

On February 13th, Argentinian federal prosecutor Gerardo Pollicita formally re-opened Nisman’s investigation into whether Argentina’s president, foreign minister, and other officials helped Iran cover up its role in the AMIA bombing. Following Nisman’s death, the re-opening of his case will shine additional attention on an already combustible situation for the government. This letter from Timmerman, which appears to be a face-saving move, is a desperate reaction by the Argentinian government to limit the ferocity of the storm.

For its part, when asked about the Timerman letter, (then) Department of State spokesperson Jen Psaki reiterated that *“for over 20 years the United States and the international community have worked with the Government of Argentina as well as victims of the bombing and their families in search for justice”* and said that the US had *“in the past contributed where we can information and that will continue”*. She then stated quite clear that *“the Iran negotiations remain focused on the nuclear issue”*.

While it appears the Timerman letter will not change the Obama Administration’s approach to the Iranian negotiations, it also appears that Nisman’s death and the investigation into Argentina’s top political leaders will impact the country’s next presidential elections, scheduled for October 25th of this year.