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Wikileaks evidences US funding to Venezuela's fascism

Caracas, 03 Mar. AVN.- Strategies used by the United States government and the funding of its agencies to opposition groups in Venezuela with a view to overthrow the Bolivarian Revolution have always had the same underlying purpose: protecting Washington's interests or businesses.

That objective has become evident in papers sent by the US embassy in Caracas to the Department of State and White House, revealed by Wikileaks.

Over the 15 years of Bolivarian Revolution, US embassy and agencies have worked to train activists, launch "social programs" and allocate funds to rightist parties for them to stage actions against the National Government.

As Hugo Chavez was never overthrown, the target now is to oust Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro whatever it takes. In fact, since he took office last April 2013, he has faced actions as hoarding of staple goods, speculation in prices, induced inflation and, more recently, violence on behalf of fascist groups.

The strategy

Among the papers released by Wikileaks, there is a report sent by the US Embassy's political counselor in Caracas, Robert Downes, named "Team's five point strategy to support the program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID)."

That report summarizes strategic points devised for the term 2004-2006; it is to say, since the Bolivarian Revolution won a recall referendum up to the following presidential elections.

The five points were: strengthening democratic institutions, penetrating Chavez's political base, protecting vital US business, and isolating Chavez internationally. These actions were carried out basically through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).

Between 2004 and 2006, OTI granted 15 million dollars to 300 "civil organizations" to allegedly protect human rights and foster education programs.

To penetrate and divide Chavez's political base, the US Embassy worked to infiltrate popular organizations. "OTI has directly reached approximately 238,000 adults through over 3000 forums, workshops and training sessions delivering... providing opportunities for opposition activists to interact with hard-core Chavistas, with the desired effect of pulling them slowly away from Chavismo," reads the report.

Likewise, OTI founded 34 non governmental organizations to penetrate Venezuelan municipalities and created programs to meddle in local groups and cause unrest in matters of punctual issues as basic services, among others.



Wikileaks evidences US funding to Venezuela's fascism...

Attracting militants in universities

A second cable, dated on February 2008, also classified by Robert Downes, reveals a meeting held by members of rightist university groups with a USAID spokesperson.

The encounter, primarily attended by members of the Law School Students' Association (Fedevé), took place on February 9, 2008 at Carlos Tinoco's house, in western state of Merida.

Among attendants, the cable mentions Lawrence Castro from the University of the Andes in Merida and current president of Fedevé; Lestor Toledo from the University of Zulia and former president of Fedevé; Dorian Gonzalez of the University of the Andes in Merida and president of its student union; Ziamar Castillo, president of the Law School Student Union at the Catholic University, Bolívar state.

The meeting was arranged by Carlos Tinoco and Carlos Ponce, "both established USAID and POL contacts with ties to student leaders."

In that meeting with the US spokesperson, they focused on university student elections on March 5, regarded as important by US diplomats. Funds were also passed by USAID and US Embassy to carry out a National Convention entitled "Students and Legal Professionals" and which would be held in Maracaibo city, Zulia state.

The group of "students" requested funds to receive counseling on behalf other groups, primarily from eastern Europe, and also to carry out workshops about "fostering democracy" and starting a radio talk show.

2009 referendum

Another cable revealed by Wikileaks is a report entitled "Presidential term limits referendum: What's at stake," dated on January 2009...

... The text, classified by US Embassy's political counselor in Caracas Daniel Lawton, focuses on actions that the North American country had to take to approach the referendum on February 2009, convened to amend the Bolivarian Constitution or not about the indefinite reelection of public posts.

It was considered a "decisive moment" for Venezuela, among other reasons, because US diplomats foresaw Chavez's reelection in 2012 in case the Revolution won the referendum. It was reason for concern.

In case of loss could, they expected division within Chavismo: "ambitious leaders" would challenge the President, though they only name Henry Falcon, who curiously joined opposition files on February 2010, just one year later. Also, they analyzed to foster the figures of Henrique Capriles and Carlos Ocariz within opposition: they had won the government of Miranda state and Sucre mayor's office, respectively, a couple months before.

They also reviewed the possibility of using USAID/OTI resources to support "civil society groups, including student groups."

More money

Another report declassified by Wikileaks was entitled "Request for additional funds to help strengthen local governments and civil society groups," authored by US Charge D'Affaires in Caracas, John Caulfield.

This file, dated on March 2009, reads that the November 2008 elections and February 2009 referendum created a new political map for Venezuela, "which provides opportunities to increase USG outreach on the local level."

The US Embassy estimated then that the USD 7 million granted by Washington to fund Venezuela's opposition in 2009 were not enough. Thus, they requested an additional 3 million dollars for a total 10 million dollars only in 2009. Out of that total, 5 million dollars would be used for "democracy delivers," supporting local governments. The work would be carried out in selected municipalities. Other USD 4 million would be allocated for "civil society support." It meant funding NGO and political parties to "develop young leaders."

The remaining million was going to be used for "election support," such as legislative elections late in 2010.



Venezuela condemns use of human rights as tool to break peace

Caracas, 03 Mar. AVN.- Venezuela's Government condemns the use of human rights with a purpose different to its real nature and as vehicle of powerful countries to reach political interests, as well as to "undermine the understanding among nations, breaking principles and norms of the United Nations charter, in detriment of international peace."

Speaking to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Venezuelan foreign minister Elias Jaua said on Monday that though the National Government is not used to exhibit its achievements and challenges in international forums, it is accurate to do it now when an international campaign of falseness and lies is under way against the country.

Rightist groups seek to present Venezuela as a country living "a situation of chaos and civil war, so I'm obliged to talk in the name of peace and dignity," Jaua said on Monday, during the 25 session of the commission, in Geneva, Switzerland.

In this connection, Jaua noted that Venezuela is territory free of illiteracy, as certified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco); as well as a country where hunger stopped being fatality, as recognized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The Venezuelan Foreign Minister affirmed that the Bolivarian Government is working to "carry out commitments assumed during its review on October 2011 to reach the presentation of a second term in 2016 with all suggestions accepted by Venezuela and achieved by 100 per cent."

Similarly, on behalf of the Venezuelan Government, Jaua recognized the labor carried out through the Universal Periodic Review as "a unique process that entails reviewing human rights in the United Nations, providing each State the capacity to inform about actions undertaken to improve the situation of human rights."

Torture has not been denounced to People Defender's Office

Caracas, 04 Mar. AVN.- People Defender's Office has not received any denounce of existence of tortured people during violent actions carried out by strike forces in different cities of the country, informed the head of that institution, Gabriela Ramirez.

At an interviewed by a local newspaper released last Monday, Ramirez detailed that a few denounces have been filed to People Defender's Office, "but not any due to torture."

"An evil campaign is being fostered" by some sectors to make people believe that torture exists in Venezuela, Ramirez said.

That campaign "clearly has as axis to claim that this is a neo-Pinochet government and thus People Defender's should be discredit too."

Ramirez said that 42 denounces of alleged damages to physical integrity have been filed to the human rights institution.

"Most of them resulted of being caught in flagrante delicto, in which a person who is committing violent actions is subdued with the progressive use of force on behalf of authorities," she detailed.

Besides, the Defender said that "amid these kind of situations, people may be injured because they are running and they are overpowered or detained by force. Most of them are people who have been blocking roads, burning garbage, making barricades; it is to say, that they incurred in felonies stipulated and sanctioned by Penal Code."



Venezuela is victim of international media campaign



Caracas, 04 Mar. AVN.- Foreign minister Elias Jaua reaffirmed to the United Nations Organization on Tuesday that national and international media outlets are carrying out a campaign against Venezuela, in an attempt to overthrow the constitutional government of president Nicolas Maduro.

At a press conference broadcast by Telesur, in Geneva, Switzerland, Jaua stated that this is a "very well designed international campaign made up by major television networks."

That campaign has involved artists "known worldwide, who may hardly know at least where Venezuela is and indeed the reality of our country's democratic process," said the Foreign Minister.

In this connection, he underscored that Venezuela is a democratically stable country, with state institutions that work well, "capable of guaranteeing peace and democracy among citizens."

Likewise, Jaua affirmed that following several days of violent demonstrations, "protests have decreased to one per cent of the country, so Venezuela is not a country that needs the meddling of any international organization right now."

Venezuela is victim of international media campaign

Those small groups fostered by rightists abroad, Jaua added, are in the pursuit of an unconstitutional ousting of the Venezuelan President.

"The main slogan among demonstrators, especially among those who carried out violence, is overthrowing the Government," he said.

Furthermore, the foreign minister said that "Venezuela has problems as any other country" and the National Government is working for solutions.

Dialog for peace

"To face the problem of criminal dialog in the country," foreign minister Elias Jaua recalled that president Nicolas Maduro has convened a national dialog.

The National Government is also working to solve problems in matters of supply in the country, "which is the result of a series of deviations in Venezuela's economy on behalf of monopolistic groups of the domestic economy."

In the pursuit of solutions, president Nicolas Maduro has convened a dialog involving the private industry. So as to devise policies to increase domestic products and stabilize the supply of food.



Venezuela, China agree new funding operations

Caracas, 04 Mar. AVN.- Venezuela and China agreed to endorse new funding operations, informed vice-president of economic area Rafael Ramirez following a visit to the Asian nation this week.

In the social network Twitter, Ramirez gave details of his visit to China, where he held a political-economic encounter with Vice-president Li Yuanchao.

"With china's vice-president, we agreed new financing operations for our country and we reviewed energy projects," he posted to his Twitter profile @RRamirezPDVSA.

In matters of politics, Ramirez said that China expressed its support to President Nicolas Maduro, who is currently facing a soft coup d'état staged by rightist political parties and supported by the US.

"People's Republic of China has expressed all support to the Bolivarian Government of President Maduro and to the whole Venezuelan people. We will win," Ramirez wrote.

Also, Ramirez informed that he stopped by in Moscow, Russia, where he met with President Vladimir Putin.

"We were also in Moscow, at meeting with President Putin, where he expressed utmost support to our government and our people."

Venezuela has tight political and economic relations with Russia and China; together, they build commercial exchange in matters of energy.

Journalist Beaten With Lead Pipe by Venezuelan Opposition Protesters

Mérida, 5th March 2014 (Venezuelanalysis.com) – Venezuelan opposition protesters in Caracas attacked three journalists following a march demanding “greater freedom of the press”. Meanwhile, barricades in Tachira state have claimed another life.

Luis Gutierrez Camargo was killed instantly during a collision with an opposition roadblock in Tachira state yesterday, communication minister Delcy Rodriguez announced via Twitter.

Rodriguez condemned the use of street barricades, describing them as “murderous methods”.

“Were the violent ones who organised these barricades unaware that they can end the life of another person? This is a protest?” Rodriguez stated.

Tachira has been an epicenter of anti-government protests for over a month, with violent groups bringing much of the state to a standstill. President Nicolas Maduro announced on Tuesday that he would establish a peace conference within the state.

Rodriguez has also announced that three journalists have been “assisted and protected by the National Guard” in Caracas, after one was beaten with a lead pipe by violent opposition demonstrators yesterday.

Photojournalist Cristian Hernandez stated via Twitter he is “fine” after being repeatedly struck with the pipe while covering the protest. He stated he was wearing a helmet at the time, and was rescued by co-workers and “several” other protesters.

Two other journalists were reportedly attacked during the incident, and Hernandez has said that he lost a camera.

The journalist had reportedly been working in the area for several days, and suggested via Twitter that the attack was in response to the arrest of a demonstrator on Monday. According to Hernandez's tweet, the attackers blamed him for the arrest.

All three journalists work for private media outlets. Dagne Cobo Buschbeck, a Caracas-based photojournalist who was on the scene, tweeted of the incident, “AFP, EFE, Reuters, Cadena Capriles, [and] Bloque Desarmes ALL attacked... they protest for freedom of expression and against censorship, and they attack photo-journalists with blows for no reason? Where’s the coherence?”



Venezuela Commemorates One Year Anniversary of Chavez's Death

Mérida, 5th March 2014 (Venezuelanalysis.com) – Venezuela has commemorated the one year anniversary of the death of former president Hugo Chavez with rallies across the country.

Supporters of the socialist president turned out in hundreds of thousands for official commemoration services, despite ongoing opposition protests.

In a show of force, in Caracas red crowds flooded the city centre for military and civil parades. Supporters of social programs launched under Chavez, along with social movements aligned with the government also rallied in the capital.

Representatives of neighbouring left leaning governments attended the commemorations, including Cuban president Raul Castro, Bolivia's Evo Morales and representatives from Ecuador, Argentina, Suriname and others.

Rallies in honour of Chavez's memory took part across the country. In the Andean city of Mérida, several thousand marched to the central Plaza Bolivar. They chanted slogans such as "Chavez lives, the struggle goes on" and "this government will continue", in response to the opposition marching chant "this government is going to fall".

Chavez's successor, President Nicolas Maduro described the late head of state as representative of the "greatest democratisation of political life in the 200 years of the (Venezuelan) republic".

"Never before in history was there a leader who authentically loved the people, who loved the humble and respected the poor," he stated.

"It was a vindication of the poor and the workers, their rights, their education, culture and dignity," Maduro stated.



Maduro with his wife Cilia Flores on the procession (Prensa Miraflores)



The civil – military procession on Heroes Avenue in Caracas (Prensa Presidencial / AVN)



Several thousand government supporters marched through the streets of Mérida in honour of Chavez's memory (Ewan Robertson / Veneuelanalysis.com)



Maduro delivered Venezuelan flag to US visitors



Caracas, 06 Mar. AVN.- Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro delivered on Thursday Venezuelan flag as a token of friendship to U.S. visitors who are in the country to support the revolutionary government, a year after physical departure of Commander Hugo Chavez.

"Let's give them this flag the people has brought to Danny Glover and brethren who come from the United States," he said in Caracas during a delivery of 192 homes.

"This is the flag that brought freedom to Latin America, the banner of the liberators Bolivar, Sucre. Yellow, blue and red, flag of American liberators," he told in nationwide radio and television hookup.

In the event, the American actor Danny Glover said the commander Hugo Chavez "was an elected leader who could raise real democracy."

He also said that the revolutionary leader is present through the Venezuelan people.

The ceremony was also attended, among other international visitors, by Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet and the American sociologist James Petras.

Venezuela breaks political, economic and diplomatic relations with Panama

Caracas, 06 de Mar. Radio Nacional de Venezuela.- The President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, said on Wednesday that due to the open conspiracy of Panamanian officials against Venezuela, he decided to break political, economic and diplomatic relations with Panama.

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"I have decided, against the open conspiracy of the Chancellor, the Ambassador and the Panamanian government, to break diplomatic relations with the government of Panama. "Nobody is going to conspire with impunity against our country to request for an intervention in our Homeland".

The Head of State stressed that this is the homeland of Bolívar, and it must be respected. And therefore he warned that the Bolivarian government "Will know how to respond to those who try to mess with Venezuela".

Maduro addressed the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, who had announced that it would be "useful" to send a mission of that body to the country. The Venezuelan head of state said that his government has not requested any OAS commission.

"Venezuela will no be stepped by any delegation of the OAS without our permission. Mr. Insulza, stand still, do not mess with who has not called you (...) we do not believe in the OAS. "



Right wing violent riot heads captured

Caracas, 06 de Mar. Radio Nacional de Venezuela.- War weapons, Molotov bombs, gunpowder, rubber and steel wires were among the materials seized on Wednesday during the capture of a group of citizens in charge of the violent riots registered in recent days in several cities of the country.



The announcement was made by the President of the Republic, Nicolas Maduro, from the Heroes Promenade in Caracas, an occasion on which he denounced a plan orchestrated by the right-wing to sabotage tunnels, highways and bridges on Wednesday in four cities of the country.

The detainees were put at the orders of the country's security agencies. The Head of State called for the implementation of the full weight of the law to pay for damages caused to thousands of Venezuelan families whose rights have been violated.

Maduro called on the Hugo Chavez Battle Units (UBCH), on the communal councils, communes, on the social, youth, workers, farmers and women movements to a permanent mobilization against fascism to "enforce the orders of Commander Hugo Chavez".

"We are trained to continue ensuring the course of the homeland in revolution", said the president, by stressing on that "any fire that shows, will be a fire that will be set off".

Vice-president reasserts call to peace

Caracas, 06 Mar. AVN.- Executive vice-president Jorge Arreaza reasserted on Thursday his call to all sectors in Venezuela to join the peace conference arranged by the National Government.

Through his Twitter profile @jaarreaza, the Vice-president said that "today is set up the Peace conference in Tachira and working groups continue in the afternoon at Peace economic conference."

The calling is part of a national discussion convened by Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro with all sectors of the country.

In addition, the Vice-president detailed that last Saturday were carried out meetings with political, economic and social representatives of Tachira state, which borders with Colombia.

Violent groups have been in Tachira streets harassing public institutions, stores and residential buildings, resulting in the death of two people in the area.



My friend Hugo: The story of a leader who revolutionized history

Caracas, 06 Mar. AVN.- Documentary My friend Hugo, through which US director Oliver Stone tells the world that "it's time to have another view of Venezuelan politics built by the revolutionary leader Hugo Chavez," was premiered on Wednesday night in Venezuela's radio and television hookup.

At the end of filming his previous documentary South of the border in 2009, Stone shared with the commander a night of reflection on his life, the rebellion of February 4, 1992 and the historical importance of the headquarters of the Mountain military museum located in the January 23 parish, west of Caracas.

"My friend Hugo is a response to that night, is one of the feelings I did not express at the time, a sort of farewell," are phrases that audiovisual production starts with.

The documentary gathers testimonials from members of the cabinet, world leaders, family and aides of commander which for 50 minutes build an image of Chavez in his different facets, including the military, communicator, president, humorist, ranger, feminist and strategist.

The Mining and Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez, the governor of Barinas state and commander's brother Adan Chavez, Minister for Electricity Jesse Chacon, president Maduro's wife Cilia Flores, singer Cristobal Jimenez and journalist Jose Vicente Rangel are some of the voices present in My friend Hugo.

Also participating was President Nicolas Maduro, who emphasized the untiring manner in which revolutionary leader use to work. "He taught us a rhythm of dense work, with commitment to the things that are being made and to the future," he said.

My friend Hugo: The story of a leader who revolutionized history...

"I met Che, I met Mao, but I can say this man (Chavez) is a character who broke the mold," said President of Uruguay Jose Mujica, one of the world leaders who told in the documentary part of his experiences with the revolutionary leader. Likewise did the president of Argentina Cristina Fernandez, Bolivia's president Evo Morales, Colombia's Juan Manuel Santos and Ecuador's Rafael Correa.

"History will miss you" are the closing words of documentary released Wednesday to commemorate the anniversary of the sowing of the supreme commander, who illustrated the path of socialism outlined in the Plan of the Nation 2013 - 2019.



Revolutionary leader Hugo Chavez and US film director Oliver Stone



When the rich protest

Caracas, 06 Mar. AVN.-

1

Colombian novelist William Ospina said that throughout the world the rich celebrate and the poor protest, while in Venezuela the poor celebrate and the rich protest. Our privileged people rebel against all those who win elections: in fourteen years, Bolivarianism triumphed in 18 out of 19 indisputable elections. The opposition rejected all of them, except a referendum in which they got a Pyrrhic victory, or isolated victories in local elections. In the December 8, 2013 municipal elections, Bolivarians won 240 out of 337 mayor's offices: it is not a surprise that disturbances had focused first in 18, then in 8 and finally in 6 opposition-governed areas with middle class population. It's not a big deal to block well-off neighbors with barriers of burning garbage under the attentive protection of local authorities and mayors. Some hired-killers shoot their own demonstrators from behind or Bolivarian supporters from buildings. Fire has been set to half a hundred public buses and several power stations. Victims from the two sides fall down: for hired-killers, what matters is the victim; raw material for transnationals of misleading information. Devotees of murder hang effigies as those that announce the Sinaloa Cartel atrocities.

2

Alejandro Fierro shrewdly says that "If true the story of the international media about the glut of youth, Chavez should have been voted out long ago, since 60% of the Venezuelan population is under 30 years" (Other News, 2-20-2014). A recent survey by GIS XXI gives clarifying data: 79% of youth between 14 and 24 years are studying. 67% of them study in public and free institutions. 90% thinks studies give many or plenty of opportunities. 73% estimates that participatory Bolivarian democracy is the best system; for 6% it's representative democracy, for 6% it is dictatorship. 60% thinks the best economic system is socialism; 21% is capitalism. Let's add to it that nine million and a half of Venezuelans -one out of three- study and one out of ten are in Higher Education. If most of students support protests, the Government would be ousted in hours due to the pushing of a third of the population. But according to the Guinness Book of World Records 2008, in that year we are the happiest country of the world. According to the Gallup Poll 2010, we are the fifth most prosperous country in the world. According to Happy Planet Index, Venezuela has a level of experienced well-being by 7.5 out of a possible 10, which draws it to Switzerland and just a decimal below Norway. In a decade, we have decreased poverty by over 30 points; we are the country with the lowest social inequality in the capitalist Latin America. This is not a pattern of frustration or lack of expectation. Mass demonstrations of Bolivarian women, students and peasants are crossing the country but international media does not record it. In Venezuela disturbs a minority mixing of violent lumpen with middle class that respects elections only when they win it.



3

Poll released on February 24 by Hinterlaces indeed casts more light. 42% of those polled thinks Maduro should complete his term; 29% thinks he should only be removed through recall referendum; only 23% chooses the option "going to the street": a majority of 71% supports then institutionality. About the country's economy, 35% claims "firm hand to hoarders and speculators;" 29% "an alliance between national government and private business;" again, only a minority 22% supports the President's "exit now."

4

The group of leaders in the forties who fosters riots not only does not represent the youth neither the majority of the country: they do not even represent the majority of opposition. Leopoldo Lopez, who unleashed violence on February 12, incited a crowd to destroy the Office of Public Prosecutions and he then disappeared; he came third in primary elections for presidential nominations. Maria Corina Machado, hectic supporter of warmongering lines, did not get not even 2% of the vote in that opportunity. The two of them are fighting for a leading role to snatch the far right leadership from Henrique Capriles, who declared that a government cannot be won over with riots in the streets, after he himself had convened one that resulted in a dozen of deaths. They do not respect democracy not even between them.

5

In 2002, employers' union Fedecamaras imposed its President as dictator for 72 hours through a coup d'état; it tried to break the country through a lock out of over two months and cut supply food off. The current wave of violence started after businesspeople vanished in dummy imports USD 50 billion that the government grants at privileged exchange rate; after businesspeople started an economic war with strategic shortage and usurious overpricing, and as soon as the government counteracted it with a Law on Fair Prices that set a maximum commercial profit margin of 30%. Do protests claim other vaporizable USD 60 billion? Legalizing profits by 1,500%? Or a new dictatorship?

6

Or are they desperately urging for a Coup d'état or foreign intervention? The latest and most violent point of riots is focused in some municipalities of bordering state of Trujillo, bridges of a long paramilitary infiltration. Excuse for an invasion that cause a secession in Venezuela's rich West? Colonizing again Bolivar's Homeland? Everything may be expected from those who think they have the right of all without the vote of anyone.

[Luis Britto Garcia](#), Venezuelan writer. Translation by AVN.



Manufacturing contempt for Venezuela

By Cyril Mychalejko, Venezuelanalysis.com; March 6th 2014. The Venezuelan opposition has been skillfully using Twitter and Facebook to disseminate horrifying photos and testimonies of alleged government violence and abuse against protesters over the last few weeks. The problem with these allegations and images which have gone viral globally, and even used by media outlets, is that they are fabrications; many of the most viral photos allegedly from Venezuela have actually depicted images from places such as Syria, Chile, Brazil - and even a US-based porn site.

“Initial, inaccurate information will be retweeted more than any subsequent correction,” wrote Craig Silverman, journalist and founder of the blog *Regret the Error*, for the Poynter Institute in a post in 2010. Silverman’s insight reveals the dangers, often ignored, about the use of Twitter and social media as a news source, as well as a tool for liberation and uprisings.

However, the way social media is being used, or some might say abused, in Venezuela is not the result of a few “bad apples” or some mischievous students taking part in opposition protests. In fact, this propaganda technique is being used by high profile opposition figures, while training anti-chavista Venezuelans to use social media has been a project of Washington for some time now.

According to Caracas-based journalist and attorney Eva Golinger, the US spent “nearly \$15 million annually by 2007...directed towards youth and student groups [in Venezuela], including training in the use of social networks to mobilize political activism. Student leaders were sent to the US for workshops and conferences on Internet activism and media networking. They were formed in tactics to promote regime change via street riots and strategic use of media to portray the government as repressive.”

The adoption of social media as a tool to advance us foreign policy objectives, including regime change, did not end with President George W. Bush’s administration. Actually, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton further developed it as a coherent policy tool labelled “21st century statecraft.” I wrote about this and how Venezuela and other Alba countries were targets for this new technological imperialism back in 2012.

In the article I noted how Judith McHale, former Under Secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs at the state department, provided clarity about how exactly Washington planned to use these new technologies in a forum hosted by John Hopkins university in march 2011.

“New media and connective technologies enhance our ability to listen...social media provides new ways for us to keep our ear to the ground,” said McHale. “Of course, we are not interested in developing social media platforms for the sake of having them. We are interested in applying social media to promote our strategic objectives in the Americas.” A few months later at a June 2011 senate hearing assistant secretary of state for western hemisphere affairs Roberta Jacobson said that the state department “has programs that support media training in Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Ecuador; these programs address the use and impact of social media...”

McHale’s remarks and Jacobson’s admission seem salient now in light of the use of how social media in Venezuela has been used to spread misinformation in attempts to destabilize the country and delegitimize that country’s democratically-elected government.



CNN published an article exposing numerous examples of misinformation disseminated by opposition folks via twitter. One example of propaganda was tweeted by Venezuelan “political consultant” Esteban Gerbasi, using a photo from Brazil as a means to suggest Venezuela is a dictatorship.

Gerbasi was quoted by the associated press in an article last November about planned anti-government protests where he expressed his displeasure with the opposition’s leadership for not taking a more confrontational, and some might say more undemocratic position, towards the government.

“The marcha autoconvocada’s purpose is precisely to demonstrate to Maduro and the opposition leadership that their time is up and that now the way out is taking to the streets,” said Gerbasi, offering a warning and foreshadowing of the recent turmoil.

Another egregious example highlighted by CNN’s report was a photo tweeted by Venezuelan actress Amanda Gutierrez which was allegedly lifted from an Us-based porn site. The photo was used by her to “prove” sexual abuse by police against anti-government protesters.

Then there is Francisco Toro, a Venezuelan blogger whose “musings” at Caracas chronicles (a website he founded) are “a must-read for foreign journalists,” according to the associated press. In an article that went viral on both Twitter and Facebook entitled “the game changed in Venezuela last night - and the international media are asleep at the switch”, Toro wrote about a “tropical pogrom” that allegedly took place one night in Venezuela - except it didn’t. There was no massacre by “paramilitaries.” One person did die from injuries sustained that night, however that was four days later. This death is a tragedy, but it is a far cry from a “pogrom” or massacre.

After this misinformation and gross exaggeration was exposed and criticized Toro took to twitter and admitted to “overstatement in the heat of the moment.” He also addressed it in a blog post which garnered a whopping 14 likes on Facebook and 12 tweets - in contrast with the hundreds of thousands of Facebook likes and over 10,000 tweets his original, factually challenged blog post amassed. This supports Silverman’s aforementioned thesis about how error corrections are not retweeted and viewed as much as the initial errors.

Furthermore, Toro took to twitter again to defend himself, this time by suggesting that Caracas chronicles shouldn’t be considered journalism - something I wholeheartedly agree with - though there should be a disclaimer at the top of each page so as not to confuse international journalists like the one at the associated press, who considers Toro a “must-read.” Toro is also an open contributor for the New York Times.

Julia Buxton, writing for the Latin America bureau, put the dangers of social media effects on traditional media in perspective:

“Despite claims that social media ‘democratizes’ the media, it is clear that in Venezuela it has had the opposite effect, exacerbating the trend towards disinformation and misrepresentation, with overseas media groups and bloggers reproducing – without verification – opposition claims and images of student injuries allegedly caused by police brutality and attacks by government supporters.”

Cyril Mychalejko is an editor at www.upsidedownworld.org.