

Color Revolutions: Washington Funds Venezuela's "Made in the USA Opposition"

\$20 million in 2012 for anti-Chavez groups

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Washington is preparing funds to support the opposition's campaign against President Hugo Chavez during the coming presidential elections in 2012

Since Hugo Chavez won his first presidential elections in 1998, the US government has been trying to remove him from power. With multimillion-dollar investments, every year Washington's agencies advise and aid anti-Chavez groups with their campaigns and strategies against the government.

Despite multiple attempts, including a coup d'etat in 2002 that briefly ousted President Chavez, their efforts have been in vain. The Venezuelan President's popularity continues to rise and opposition leaders have failed to convince constituents of their plans. The latest polls show Chavez's support above 57%, while the opposition fails to even reach 20%.

Nonetheless, Washington continues to seek new mechanisms to achieve its eternal objective of recovering control over Venezuela's strategic resources – the largest oil reserves on the planet – and this means putting an end to Hugo Chavez.

One of the US government's principal tactics has been feeding the internal conflict in Venezuela through the consolidation of an opposition movement, that despite its impossibility of uniting, continues to maintain itself active in the country's political sphere.

THE MONEY

The main engine behind this tactic has been the multimillion-dollar investment of Washington's agencies, together with several European and Canadian foundations, in the Venezuelan opposition. The money has come with strategic support from top campaign and political consultants, who aid in everything from image to discourse.

Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a congressionally created entity funded by the State Department, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), **Washington has channeled more than \$100 million to anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela since 2002.** A majority of those substantial funds have been used to run opposition candidates' campaigns, as well as finance those well crafted media campaigns against the Chavez government that flood the national and international press.

Despite the economic crisis in the US, the funds to Venezuela's opposition continue to flow.

In February 2011, President Barack Obama requested \$5 million for opposition

groups in Venezuela in his 2012 National Budget. It marked the first time a sitting US president openly requested money in the national budget to fund Chavez's opposition, especially during a time when domestic funding is being cut. Apparently, Obama prefers to spend US taxpayer dollars on efforts to oust the Venezuelan President – elected democratically and supported by the majority – instead of investing in the health and well being of the US people.

Those \$5 million comprise only a quarter of the total funds so far prepared by Washington for the Venezuelan opposition in 2012.

THE EMBASSY

The US Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, has been the center of distribution and coordination of the majority of USAID and NED funds since 2002. However, until the end of 2010, USAID maintained offices of 3 contractors in Caracas: International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI). Through these entities, particularly DAI, USAID channeled millions each year to hundreds of opposition groups, programs, projects and campaigns in Venezuela. IRI and NDI supplied more political advice and aid than liquid funds.

These three agencies abruptly parted Venezuela after the nation's legislative body passed a law in December 2010 prohibiting foreign funding for political means in the country. In early 2011, USAID published a statement on its website claiming its Venezuela program had been transferred to the Washington office. No other information was provided.

Nevertheless, USAID's 2012 budget includes \$5 million more for its work in Venezuela. The agency, which is a funding branch of the State Department, has no authorized projects in Venezuela or agreements with the Venezuelan government. From the beginning, its motives have been purely political.

Without the presence of these three agencies in Caracas, the US Embassy has taken on an even more important role – evident in the major boost in its 2012 budget. In 2010, the Embassy in Caracas had an annual budget of \$18,022,000; in 2011 it dropped to \$15,980,000. But in 2012, the budget swoops up to \$24,056,000, nearly a \$9 million increase.

The US doesn't even have an ambassador in that embassy, nor plans to name one. Relations with Venezuela are frozen and handled at the "charge d'affairs" level. Furthermore, the number of embassy staff has remained the same since 2010: 81 employees. So, what is the extra \$9 million for?

There is no doubt that these funds are destined for the electoral campaigns in 2012, when Venezuela has both presidential and regional elections. Now that USAID and its contractors are no longer operating in-country, the embassy will be the principle channel to ensure those funds reach their destination.

So far, the total reaches \$19 million – at minimum – from Washington to the Venezuelan opposition in 2012, but that's not all.

In the State Department's 2012 budget, \$48,160,000 was requested to fund the Organization of American States (OEA). In the justification for those funds, State specifies that part of the money will be used "to deploy special 'democracy practitioner' teams to states where democracy faces threats from the growing presence of alternate concepts such as the 'participatory democracy' advocated by Venezuela and Bolivia".

Additionally, the budget claims the funds will be used to support "the appropriate responses to threats on freedom of expression and abuses by governments against their people, particularly in states such as Venezuela and Cuba".

At minimum, a few of those \$48 million will be filtered to groups in Venezuela that work against the government of Hugo Chavez.

THE NED

And then there's still the NED, which funds with at least \$1 million annually a dozen groups in Venezuela, including Sumate, CEDICE, Futuro Presente, Liderazgo y Visión, Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPyS), Consorcio Justicia, Radar de los Barrios, Ciudadanía Activa, and others.

The NED's budget for 2012, which is \$104,000,000, states the following: "In the Andean region, the Venezuelan presidential election scheduled for December 2012 will have relevant consequences for the country and the neighborhood, as President Chavez seeks reelection for an additional six-year term. NED will support civil society organizations in their efforts to enhance voter participation and promote free, fair and competitive elections".

Although the exact amount of money the NED will be providing to Venezuelan opposition groups in 2012 is not specified, it's plans to intervene in Venezuela's electoral process is obvious.

These multimillion-dollar funds destined to the Venezuelan opposition in 2012 leave no doubt that Washington will continue its plans to interfere in Venezuela's internal politics, while trying - by any means - to impede the future of the Bolivarian Revolution. At the same time, these millions reinforce the decade-old belief that Chavez's opposition remains "Made in USA".

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