

Money and Intervention in Venezuela. Wikileaks: US Embassy Requests Funding for Anti-Chavez Groups

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The latest Wikileaks releases include cables sent from the US Embassy in Caracas to the State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, and other US entities, indicating requests for additional US government funding for opposition groups in Venezuela. The cables corroborate documents previously obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) that evidence ongoing US funding to support anti-Chavez groups and political parties in Venezuela actively working to destabilize and overthrow the South American government.

One document dated March 2009, authored by Charge D’Affaires John Caulfield, reveals \$10 million in funding via the US Embassy in Caracas to state and municipal opposition governments, as well as several NGOs, youth groups and political campaigns to counter the Chavez government. Curiously, in the confidential cable, Caulfield requests an additional \$3 million (on top of an already-approved \$7 million) due to a “change” in Venezuela’s “political map”.

“Given that the November 2008 elections and February 2009 referendum created a new political map for Venezuela, post requests an additional USD 3 million to increase outreach efforts to newly elected state and municipal governments, as well as to continue programs to strengthen civil society and prepare for the next round of elections in 2010”.

Caulfield adds, “...redoubling our effort is necessary to counter the increasing authoritarianism of the Chavez government”, indicating clear political intent to justify the funding.

The US diplomat was referring to regional elections in 2008 during which opposition parties won in 6 out of 23 states and dozens of municipalities. Apparently, the Embassy was keen on providing immediate aid to those regions to reinforce their efforts.

ILLEGAL INTERVENTION

Embassies, consulates and diplomats are prohibited under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Affairs from intervening in the politics and internal affairs of a host nation. Funding from foreign governments for political groups and campaigns is also prohibited and illegal in Venezuela, as it is in the United States. Nonetheless, Caulfield doesn’t hide his intentions when he writes, “...our effort is necessary to counter...the Chavez government”.

Caulfield also admits that US government funding helped create many of the organizations

in Venezuela receiving the aid and that those same groups would most likely not exist or survive without US support. "Without our continued assistance, it is possible that the organizations we helped create...could be forced to close...Our funding will provide those organizations a much-needed lifeline".

The majority of Venezuelan groups receiving US funding were created after 2002, when the State Department set up its unauthorized Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), a political branch of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Caracas. That same year, a coup d'état was executed against the Chavez government, briefly ousting the Venezuelan President. He was later rescued within 48 hours by loyal armed forces and millions of Venezuelans. Those involved in the coup were all receiving US government funding and support through both the Embassy and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an agency funded by the US Congress. The OTI, which has consistently funded and strategically supported dozens of Venezuelan political parties and NGOs with millions of US taxpayer dollars annually, abruptly closed at the beginning of 2011 after being exposed and denounced for its illegal meddling activities in Venezuela.

Nonetheless, President Obama has already requested an additional \$5 million to fund opposition groups in Venezuela in his 2012 budget. This amount is expected to increase with funds from other US agencies in preparation for Venezuela's presidential and regional elections next year.

The \$10 million dished out by the US Embassy to local opposition governments and "civil society" groups was slated to "support local NGOs in order to work as watchdogs on issues key for democratic development", i.e. against the democratically-elected government. Five million dollars were directed towards supporting political parties and local governance to help newly elected opposition governments "show delivery on promises made to the people during the November 2008 political campaigns". Is this really where US taxpayer dollars should be going?

Another \$4 million went to "interested political parties, to develop young leaders and increase outreach to...the Venezuelan youth movement". A particular target of US funding, anti-Chavez student and youth movements have popped up during the past 3 years receiving overrated media coverage and foreign attention.

Another one million of this funding went towards preparing the grounds for the 2010 legislative campaigns. During 2010, however, an additional \$57 million was provided to the Venezuelan opposition from both US and European agencies.

MONEY AND INTERVENTION

Another US Embassy cable from September 2009, sent by then US Ambassador to Venezuela Patrick Duddy, recounted a meeting held between the US diplomat and three representatives from the small opposition party, Podemos. During the meeting, Ismael Garcia, legislator and leader of Podemos, specifically requested more US government funding and intervention to counteract President Chavez.

"As he has repeatedly done in the past, Garcia pointedly asked what the United States, through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) or other USG (US Government) channels, could do to help Podemos. Molina and Garcia suggested that US support could be used for Podemos to build an internet - or

cable TV-based communications network...The Ambassador emphasized that the United States is not intervening (sic) in Venezuela, to which Garcia responded, "Yes, but now is the time to begin".

What these documents evidence, besides illegal US government meddling and hypocrisy, is the ongoing relationship of dependence between the Venezuelan opposition and Washington. US efforts to undermine the Chavez administration have largely depended on the capacity of the opposition to destabilize the country and counter Chavez. After years of multimillion-dollar investments in these groups, which now depend on US government funding, few advances have been made. This scenario could explain the recent aggressive actions the Obama administration is taking against Venezuela, imposing sanctions and attempting to falsely and maliciously link the Chavez government to terrorism and portray it as a "failed state".

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