

US ‘Virtual Ambassador’ to Venezuela Hosts Insurrectionist Summit Ahead of Biden’s Guaidó Recognition

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A closed-door Bogotá summit of fugitive Venezuelan insurrectionists highlighted James Story’s role as Washington’s manager of the radical right-wing opposition. So who is the US “virtual ambassador” to Venezuela?

US “virtual ambassador” to Venezuela James “Jimmy” Story promised to answer a series of questions sent to him by The Grayzone this February 24. But after a Whatsapp exchange with this reporter during which Story offered to explain why he regularly alternated between [Gargamel and the Smurfs](#) as his avatar on the messaging app, the promised exchange never took place.

On March 2, Story’s assistant, **David Fogelson**, informed The Grayzone that the virtual ambassador “won’t be able to do the interview.” He offered no further details on Story’s turnabout.

That same day, during a Zoom event with the Venezuelan American Association of the US, Story boasted that his willingness to accept a few critical questions from his online audience “shows a transparency that the regime [in Caracas] does not show.”

The Grayzone’s unanswered questions to Story related to a closed-door summit the ambassador hosted between February 19 and 26 at the Bogotá Marriott hotel.

In a meeting at his home listed on the summit’s agenda, the ambassador served up barbecued meats and fine libations to a group of fugitive Venezuelan insurrectionists and far-right opposition leaders as they planned the next phase of the US-backed regime-change operation against the elected leftist government in Caracas.

The details of the meeting came to light after a Colombian official leaked news of the meeting to Venezuela’s government.

“Here is the agenda from the meeting that someone from the Duque government, angered that this is taking place on their soil, sent us,” tweeted the president of Venezuela’s National Assembly, **Jorge Rodríguez**, on

February 22.

The tweet was accompanied by a screenshot of a document which outlined the itinerary of the conference, which was called “Visit of the Venezuelan Presidential Commission.”

Ya están meneando la colita en el Marriot de Bogotá, [@leopoldolopez](#), [@JulioBorges](#), Manuel Rosales. Hoy llega el arrastrado de [@carlosvechio](#). Aquí la agenda de reuniones que alguien del gob de Duque, indignado de que eso ocurra en su suelo, nos envía. Abro hilo indignado pic.twitter.com/fBIF3Pu1na

— Jorge Rodríguez (@jorgerpsuv) [February 22, 2021](#)

According to Rodríguez, the summit’s attendees included right-wing opposition leader [Leopoldo López](#), attorney and former lawmaker **Julio Borges**, and [former Exxon lawyer Carlos Vecchio](#), who now serves as “ambassador” for Guaidó in Washington.

All three men are currently [evading either criminal charges or prison sentences](#) in Venezuela for crimes ranging from incitement of violence to participation in attempts to assassinate Venezuelan **President Nicolás Maduro**.

Following the delegates’ arrival to Bogotá, the first event listed on their agenda was a welcome barbecue which took place on Sunday, February 21. Story confirmed the cookout on his weekly [“Alo Embajador”](#) YouTube livestream, noting that he roasted a pig. Joined by Juan Guaidó as his guest, Story insisted that he did not serve 18-year-old whiskey, as the Colombian source [claimed to Rodríguez](#).

According to the agenda tweeted by Rodríguez, the Venezuelan coup-plotters spent Monday, February 22, gathered at Story’s residence. Topics for discussion included how to encourage “a transition from a position of strength” in Venezuela as well as the potential for unity among opposition parties.

The week-long summit also allotted time for conversations exploring the possibility of invoking the interventionist “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine in order to justify the invasion of Venezuela under the guise of humanitarian protection, as well as at least six “meetings with Washington.” Insistent that a broad panoply of the opposition was on board with Washington’s agenda, Story claimed to The Grayzone that 25 parties participated in the conference.

Several US agencies were [listed](#) in agenda documents as participants in the meetings. They included the State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs; the State Department Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; the [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#); and the White House National Security team. Think tanks were also listed as participants, but were left unnamed.

Reuniones Propuestas con Washington (horas y oficiales para confirmar)

Oficina de Asuntos del Hemisferio Occidental del Departamento de Estado (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs-State/WHA): Para hablar sobre la estrategia de construir un movimiento cívico-político, condiciones dentro de Venezuela, represión de los actores democráticos, y el papel de la comunidad internacional.

Consejo Nacional de Seguridad de la Casa Blanca (White House National Security Council-NSC): Para hablar sobre la estrategia de construir un movimiento cívico-político, condiciones dentro de Venezuela, represión de actores democráticos, y el papel de la comunidad internacional.

Agencia de los EEUU para el Desarrollo Internacional – Oficina de América Latina y el Caribe (USAID/LAC): Para presentar la estructura, metas y estrategia para 2021, particularmente como se relaciona con programas de cooperación internacional.

Oficina de Democracia, Derechos Humanos y Trabajo del Departamento de Estado (Bureau of Democracy, Labor, and Human Rights-DRL): Para hablar sobre la represión de los actores democráticos y las violaciones sistemáticas de los derechos humanos, y también la necesidad de construir un movimiento amplio cívico-político para la transición democrática. DRL tiene interés particular en: movimientos laborales y sindicatos (maestros, trabajadores de salud, enfermeras) y el movimiento estudiantil, y como potencializarlos; y en la base de los partidos políticos, sus decisiones sobre elecciones y cómo la comunidad internacional pueda apoyar la lucha para condiciones electorales.

Oficina para Asuntos Humanitarios de la USAID (USAID/BHA) y **la Oficina de Población, Refugiados y Migración del Departamento de Estado** (State/PRM): Una reunión conjunta para conversar sobre asistencia humanitaria y a los refugiados dentro de Venezuela y en la región.

Departamento de Tesoro (Treasury): Para hablar sobre la implementación de las sanciones y sus impactos.

Departamento de Agricultura (USDA): Para demostrar como el intercambio de agricultura con los EEUU apoya la seguridad alimentaria de Venezuela, y para hablar sobre el papel de USDA en coordinar programas de alimentación y créditos.

Oficina de Asuntos Antinarcoóticos y Aplicación de la Ley del Departamento de Estado (State/INL): Para hablar sobre la serie de conferencias internacionales sobre criminalidad transnacional desde Venezuela, y el papel de INL en reformas de los servicios policiales y de seguridad.

Oficina de Conflicto y Operaciones de Estabilización del Departamento de Estado (State/CSO): Para hablar sobre los programas de CSO, específicamente su investigación sobre grupos ilegales armados y planeación sectorial.

Reunión con Washington 1 (1 hr)

Descanso (30 min)

Reunión con Washington 2 (1 hr)

Descanso (30 min)

The event highlighted Story as the Biden administration's de facto manager of the radical wing of Venezuela's opposition that seeks regime change at all costs. The apparent outcome of the meeting suggested he has played a pivotal role in ensuring continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations on Venezuela.

On March 2, a week after the summit in Bogotá, US **Secretary of State Antony Blinken** [formally recognized](#) Juan Guaidó as "Interim President," endorsing the maximalist Trump policy that rejected negotiations or any accommodation with Venezuela's elected, UN-recognized President Nicolás Maduro.

Despite his central role in the Venezuelan regime-change scheme, Story has escaped the international scrutiny that other US officials like former [State Department liaison to Venezuela Elliott Abrams](#) have received. Story's backstory may be less intriguing than that of Abrams, and certainly less sordid. However, he has been at the forefront of the US infiltration of South America, and helped set the stage for the assault on Venezuelan sovereignty through his participation in the Plan Colombia counter-insurgency campaign that consolidated Bogotá as a right-wing base of US influence.

Portraits of a putschist

James Story's official title is US ambassador to Venezuela, though he has not worked inside the country since March of 2019. He is currently based in neighboring Colombia, where he coordinates Washington's efforts to overthrow the Maduro government from within the US embassy in Bogotá.

In his official biography, he is described as a "career Senior Foreign Service Officer" with experience working in Afghanistan, Mozambique, Mexico, and Brazil.

Following a three-year stint as the US Consulate General in Rio, Story moved to Caracas in July of 2018 to serve as deputy chargé d' affaires. The Venezuelan government had expelled chargé d' affaires **Todd Robinson** in May of that year, making Story the highest ranking US official in Venezuela.

Within six months of Story's arrival in Venezuela, in January of 2019, the US announced its recognition of Juan Guaidó, a previously unknown opposition lawmaker, as president. As he worked to propel the coup, Story got close and personal with the self-proclaimed "interim president" and other opposition leaders.

On March 3, 2019, Story posted a photo to his Facebook profile showing himself on a friendly hike with former presidential candidate and rightist opposition figure **Henrique Capriles Radonski** during his time in Caracas.

"Climbed the Avila today with former Mayor, Governor, and Presidential candidate Henrique Capriles," Story declared.

"The Venezuelan people love him," Story enthused.



Jimmy Story is with Susan West Story.

March 3, 2019 · 🌐



Climbed the Avila mountain today with former Mayor, Governor, and Presidential candidate Henrique Capriles. Let's just say this was easier for one of us than the other... The Venezuelan people love him.



👍❤️ 262

36 Comments 2 Shares

The following afternoon, Story posted a photo he took of Guaidó standing on top of a car surrounded by supporters with the caption, "Venezuela's Interim President Juan Guaidó is back."

Guaidó was returning from a regional tour during which he participated in a failed attempt to violate Venezuela's sovereignty by [ramming a convoy of USAID trucks](#) across the country's border. Story's photo shows him in close proximity to the self-proclaimed "president," and suggests he played a role in shepherding Guaidó from place to place.



Jimmy Story is with Susan West Story.

March 4, 2019 · 🌐



Venezuela's Interim President Juan Guaidó is back...



Two weeks after publishing the photo, on March 11, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza informed Story that US diplomatic staff were no longer welcome in the country.

Story's attraction to toppling leftist leaders was not limited to Venezuela. When a [far-right military coup](#) drove Bolivia's elected president, **Evo Morales**, out of the country, destroyed his house, burned his sister's home, poisoned his dogs, and orchestrated a [national campaign of terror](#) against his supporters, Story took to Facebook to celebrate the anti-democratic putsch.


Jimmy Story
November 10, 2019 · 🌐

The power of a people to decide their own fate should never be underestimated. Proud of the brave people of Bolivia to say enough is enough. Venezuela will also one day be free of tyranny.

👍❤️ 154 5 Comments 4 Shares

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 **Eduardo Mack**
Well put!
Like · 1y

In March 2020, Story promoted the multimillion-dollar bounty the Trump administration placed on the heads of Venezuelan President Maduro and several political allies on the dubious grounds that they were leaders of a previously unknown and [likely non-existent](#) drug cartel allegedly called “Cartel of the Suns.”



The photos remain on Story's Facebook page as mementos of his proud role as de facto manager of the radical figures vaulted by the US to the helm of Venezuela's opposition, and of his own dedication to regime change by any means.

When appearing in the US media, however, Story assumes a dramatically different image as a Southern gentleman with a careful, diplomatic touch.

Steely huntsman at helm of embattled US Embassy in Caracas

By JOSHUA GOODMAN February 1, 2019



AP's February 1, 2019 puff piece of James Story

Behind the puff pieces, Story's real role comes to light

In a [glowing profile of James Story](#), whom it billed as a “steely huntsman at helm of embattled US Embassy in Caracas,” the Associated Press proclaimed that the diplomat’s “down-home Southern charm has opened doors.”

“In a rare feat for U.S. diplomats in Venezuela, who are usually ensconced in the hilltop U.S. Embassy compound liaising with opposition politicians,” gushed the AP, “Story has managed to establish a rapport with a number of powerful Venezuelan government officials, all the while gingerly sidestepping the political minefield running through anti-Maduro Miami that has made engagement a risky endeavor for any U.S. official. He also won the respect of his staff by joining the embassy’s softball team within days of arrival.”

Since his expulsion from Venezuela in March 2019, Story has worked out of the US embassy in Bogotá under a variety of titles, with former US President Donald Trump most recently appointing him to serve as “ambassador” to Venezuela in May of 2020.

Due to the US’ continued recognition of Guaidó – despite his failure to secure control of Venezuela’s government or even unite the country’s fractured opposition – no official diplomatic ties currently exist between Caracas and Washington. Until news of the recent summit of Venezuelan fugitives in Bogotá came to light, Story’s duties as “virtual ambassador to Venezuela based in Colombia” remained shrouded in mystery.

In its fawning portrait of Story, the AP quoted his former boss, US diplomat John Feeley, as saying “he can deftly sip cocktails with the diplomats but his heart is still somewhere duck-hunting in an early morning blind.”

Story brought his interest in foreign intrigue together with his passion for southern hospitality by serving up platters of grilled pork to a crew of fire-breathing coup leaders gathered at his home in Bogotá. But Story’s talents extended beyond charming the

representatives of Latin American oligarchy, and into the murky world of drug wars and paramilitary repression.

A drug warrior defends bombing peasants with chemical weapons

Perhaps the most disturbing yet little known detail in James Story's biography relates to his time working out of the US embassy in Colombia.

For roughly 25 years, the US oversaw an [aerial fumigation program](#) in Colombia, spraying approximately 4.4 million acres of its land with the cancer-causing herbicide known as glyphosate. (In the US, this substance is known as RoundUp. Its manufacturer, Monsanto, has [paid out \\$10 billion](#) to settle a class action lawsuit filed by cancer victims.)

The aerial crop eradication policy had a devastating impact on Colombia's rural population. Thousands of people are estimated to have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the fumigations, while people living in affected areas "report[ed] skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal issues" according to the [Center for International Environmental Law](#) (CIEL).

"In addition to impacts on human health, environmental damages are also rampant. Spraying has led to massive crop loss," CIEL added. "Residual spray has led to chemical seepage into groundwater and aquifers. The destruction of non-targeted plants has damaged some of the most biologically diverse regions, jeopardizing their very existence."

In 2011, CNN featured a [rare report](#) exposing the US aerial fumigation program's role in destroying the livelihoods of Colombian farmers. The CNN segment covered a documentary about Avelardo Joya, one of the 3.5 million Colombians internally displaced under the US government's Plan Colombia counter-insurgency campaign.

The US crop eradication policy ruined Joya's cacao and plantain farm, making him a refugee in his own country.

"They've destroyed our food," Joya lamented to the filmmakers. "That's the only thing they destroy, because our food crops cannot resist the poison they drop."

To balance its report, CNN managed to find one voice willing to speak positively about the fumigation program. It belonged to the current US "virtual ambassador" to Venezuela.

"The aerial eradication program run by the government of Colombia has been extraordinarily successful," Story proclaimed from within the comfort of his air-conditioned office, where he worked at the time as director of the narcotic affairs section of the US embassy.

Story went on to claim the policy resulted in a 40 percent drop in coca cultivation, while admitting, "there is some drift that happens" with regard to neighboring farms.

The full CNN segment featuring Story's comments is embedded below:



[Watch the video here.](#)

According to the US embassy’s website, its narcotic affairs section in Colombia “advises the Ambassador on counternarcotics policy and works in close coordination with DOJ, DHS, and U.S. military counterparts.”

The US “virtual ambassador” to Venezuela has been marketed as an affable Southern gentleman, and there’s little reason to doubt he can serve up a lip-smacking rack of ribs. But the real story about Story lies behind the media-crafted image of the “steely huntsman,” and in the bowels of the US national security architecture, where coups are hatched, puppets are groomed, and peasants are transformed into refugees by the millions.

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