

Who is Behind Regime Change? “Revolution Business” NGO Supported by Wall Street and US Intelligence

Exposed: Globally Renowned Activist Collaborated with Intelligence Firm Stratfor

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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This incisive article first published by Nation of Change and Global Research in February 2014 is of particular relevance in assessing Washington’s objective to topple reformist government in the Middle East and Latin America.

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Serbia’s [Srdja Popovic](#) is known by many as a [leading architect](#) of [regime changes](#) in Eastern Europe and elsewhere since the late-1990s, and as one of the co-founders of Otpor!, the U.S.-funded Serbian activist group which overthrew Slobodan Milošević in 2000.

Lesser known, an exclusive Occupy.com investigation reveals that Popovic and the Otpor! offshoot [CANVAS](#) (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies) have also maintained close ties with a Goldman Sachs executive and the private intelligence firm [Stratfor](#) (Strategic Forecasting, Inc.), as well as the U.S. government. Popovic’s wife also worked at Stratfor for a year.

These revelations come in the aftermath of thousands of new emails released by [Wikileaks’ “Global Intelligence Files.”](#) The emails reveal Popovic worked closely with Stratfor, an Austin, Texas-based private firm that gathers intelligence on geopolitical events and activists for [clients](#) ranging from the American Petroleum Institute and Archer Daniels Midland to Dow Chemical, Duke Energy, Northrop Grumman, Intel and Coca-Cola.

Referred to in emails under the moniker [“SR501,”](#) Popovic was first approached by Stratfor in 2007 to give a lecture in the firm’s office about events transpiring in Eastern Europe, according to a Stratfor source who asked to remain confidential for this story.

In one of the emails, Popovic forwarded information about activists harmed or killed by the [U.S.-armed Bahraini government](#), obtained from the Bahrain Center for Human Rights during the regime’s crackdown on pro-democracy activists in fall 2011. Popovic also [penned a blueprint](#) for Stratfor on how to unseat the now-deceased Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in September 2010.

Stratfor’s Global Activist Connector

Using his celebrated activist status, Popovic opened many doors for Stratfor to meet with

activists globally. In turn, the information Stratfor intended to gain from Popovic's contacts would serve as "actionable intelligence"—[the firm billed itself as a "Shadow CIA"](#)—for its corporate clients.

Popovic passed information to Stratfor about on-the-ground activist events in countries around the world, ranging from the [Philippines](#), [Libya](#), [Tunisia](#), [Vietnam](#), [Iran](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Egypt](#), [Tibet](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [Poland and Belarus](#), [Georgia](#), [Bahrain](#), [Venezuela](#) and [Malaysia](#). Often, the emails reveal, Popovic passed on the information to Stratfor without the consent of the activists and likely without the activists ever knowing that their emails were being shuttled to the private security firm.

In the U.S., this investigation's co-author, Carl Gibson (representing US Uncut), and the Yes Men's Andy Bichlbaum had a meeting with Popovic shortly after their two respective groups used a [media hoax](#) to play a prank on General Electric, ridiculing the company over its [non-payment of U.S. taxes](#).

The pair gave Popovic information about both groups' plans for the coming year and news later came out that Stratfor [closely monitored the Yes Men's activities](#). (The blow photograph taken by Bichlbaum in April 2011 shows Popovic (L) and US Uncut's Carl Gibson.)

During the Arab Spring, in Egypt in January 2011, Popovic [received an interview invitation](#) for an appearance on CNN. The first people he turned to for talking points were Stratfor employees, who [provided him with five talking points](#) to lead with.

Stratfor said Popovic's main use for the firm was his vast array of grassroots activist contacts around the world.

"A little reminder that the main utility in this contact is his ability to connect us to the troublemakers around the world that he is in touch with. His own ability to discern situation on the ground may be limited, he mainly has initial contact with an asset and then lets them do their own thing," [reads a May 2010 email](#) written by former Stratfor Eurasia Analyst Marko Papic. "He does himself have information that may be useful from time to time. But, the idea is to gather a network of contacts through CANVAS, contacts that we can then contact independently."

Popovic was so well-received by Stratfor that [he even got his wife, Marijah, a job there](#). She worked for a year from March 2010 [through March 2011](#) as the weekend open source intelligence analyst at Stratfor. [The other candidate for the job, Jelena Tancic, also worked for CANVAS](#).

"The Canvas guy [Popovic] is a friend/source [for Stratfor], and recommended her to us," [Stratfor's Vice President of Analysis Scott Stewart](#) said in a [March 2010 email](#), leaving out that the two were dating at the time.

Popovic and his wife grew so close to Stratfor, in fact, that Popovic [invited numerous members of the Stratfor staff to their wedding](#) in Belgrade, Serbia.

Helping Stratfor Manufacture Revolutions

Stratfor saw Popovic's main value not only as a source for intelligence on global

revolutionary and activist movements, but also as someone who, if needed, could help overthrow leaders of countries hostile to U.S. geopolitical and financial interests. So useful was Popovic to Stratfor that the firm gave him a free subscription, dubbed "[legit sources we use all the time as a company](#)" by Papic.

In a [June 2011 email](#), Papic referred to Popovic as a "great friend" of his and described him as a "Serb activist who travels the world fomenting revolution."

"They...basically go around the world trying to topple dictators and autocratic governments (ones that U.S. does not like ;)," [Papic says in one email](#). Replying to a follow up to that email, he states, "They just go and set up shop in a country and try to bring the government down. When used properly, more powerful than an aircraft carrier battle group."

In response to the "aircraft battle group" email, [Stratfor Vice President of Intelligence Fred Burton](#) sardonically said that perhaps they could be [sent into Iran](#). Emails also reveal Popovic [served as an information source](#) intermediary for [on-the-ground activists](#) in Iran, also informing Stratfor of the [funding struggle for "democracy programs"](#) there, as the U.S. government pushed a "soft power" agenda.

Another March 2010 email from Stewart to Burton said that CANVAS was "[trying to get rid of Chavez](#)," referring to the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. In 2007, CANVAS [trained activists to overthrow Chavez](#).

"If I remember correctly, we use hushmail communication to contact him regarding Venezuela due to the sensitivity of using a revolutionary NGO as a source considering we have clients who operate in country," [Papic said in a January 2011 email](#) of Popovic.

Stratfor grew so enamored of CANVAS's ability to foment regime change abroad that it [invited Popovic to its Austin headquarters in 2010 to give seminars](#) on the subject, and paid for his trip there.

CANVAS's Goldman Sachs Cash

[One of CANVAS's major funders is Muneer Satter](#), a former Goldman Sachs executive who [stepped down from that position in June 2012](#) and now owns Satter Investment Management LLC. [Stratfor CEO Shea Morenz](#) worked for ten years at Goldman Sachs as well, where he served as Managing Director in the Investment Management Division and Region Head for Private Wealth Management for the Southwest Region.

Satter is meanwhile a major funder of the Republican Party, [giving over \\$300,000 to Karl Rove's Super PAC](#) Crossroads GPS before the 2012 election, and [another \\$100,000 to the Republican Governors Association](#) in the first half of 2013 prior to the 2014 mid-term elections.

Living in a [massive, \\$9.5 million mansion](#) in Chicago's North Shore suburb of Lake Michigan, Muneer also [gave \\$50,000 toward President Obama's inaugural fund](#) in 2009.

When it came time to connect Muneer with the global intelligence firm, Popovic served as the middle man [introducing Satter to Stratfor Chairman George Friedman](#).

"Whenever I want to understand the details behind world events, I turn to Stratfor," reads an endorsement from Satter [on Stratfor's website](#). "They have the most detailed and

insightful analysis of world affairs and are miles ahead of mainstream media.”

Otpor!: A Counter-History

To understand how Popovic came to aide Stratfor in its intelligence-gathering efforts, it's crucial to examine Otpor! and CANVAS critically. A close examination demonstrates that Popovic was a natural choice to be a Stratfor informant and close advisor.

Often [valorized by grassroots activists](#) and [Western media](#), there was far more to the “Bulldozer Revolution” that led to the overthrow of Milošević and subsequent Eastern European regimes than meets the eye.

“In principle, [Serbia] was an overt operation, funded by congressional appropriations of around \$10 million for fiscal 1999 and \$31 million for 2000. Some Americans involved in the anti-Milosevic effort said they were aware of CIA activity at the fringes of the campaign, but had trouble finding out what the agency was up to,” explained a 2000 [investigative piece appearing in The Washington Post](#).

“The lead role was taken by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the government’s foreign assistance agency, which channeled the funds through commercial contractors and nonprofit groups such as NDI and its Republican counterpart, the International Republican Institute (IRI).”

“In fact between 1997 and 2000 the National Endowment for Democracy and US government may have accomplished what NATO’s 37,000 bombing sorties had been unable to do: oust Milosevic, replace him with their favoured candidate Vojislav Kostunica and promote a neoliberal vision for Serbia,” independent scholar Michael Barker wrote for Z Magazine. “In much the same way as corporate front groups and astroturf groups recruit genuinely committed supporters, strategically useful social movements can potentially dominate civil society when provided with the right resources (massive financial and professional backing).”

Otpor! was so successful that it was [ushered into Ukraine to help manufacture regime change](#) there in 2004, [using the template applied originally in Serbia](#) with [\\$65 million](#) in cash from the U.S. government.

“We trained them in how to set up an organization, how to open local chapters, how to create a ‘brand,’ how to create a logo, symbols, and key messages,” an Otpor! activist [told U.S.-funded media outlet Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty](#). “We trained them in how to identify the key weaknesses in society and what people’s most pressing problems were—what might be a motivating factor for people, and above all young people, to go to the ballot box and in this way shape their own destiny.”

The overthrow of Milošević was accompanied by U.S.-funding for the creation of a robust media apparatus in Serbia, and Popovic’s wife worked at one of the U.S.-funded radio and TV outlets as a journalist and anchor [B92](#) from 2004-2009.

“By helping Radio B92 and linking it with a network of radio stations (ANEM), international assistance undermined the regime’s direct and indirect control over news and information,” a [January 2004 policy paper released by USAID explained](#). “In Serbia, independent media supported by USAID and other international donors facilitated the regime change.”

Critics point out that what happened in Eastern Europe was regime change, not revolution in any real sense of the term.

“[They] were not revolutions at all; actually, they were little more than intra-elite power transfers,” Portland State University Professor of Urban Studies and Planning, [Gerald Sussman](#), explained in his book, “[Branded Democracy: U.S. Regime Change in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe](#).”

“Modern tactics of electioneering were employed to cast regime change as populist, which took advantage of the unstable and vulnerable situations in those regions following the breakup of the Soviet Union,” he wrote.

Given Otpor!’s ties to powerful factions in the U.S. government, perhaps it’s unsurprising that Popovic felt comfortable [giving a lecture to the Air Force Academy in May 2010](#), and [attending a National Security Council meeting in December 2009](#).

A powerful individual who [lobbied the U.S. government to give money to CANVAS](#) early on was Michael McFaul, [the current U.S. Ambassador to Russia for the State Department](#) and someone who “worked closely with” Popovic while [serving as a Senior Fellow](#) at the [right-wing Hoover Institution](#) at Stanford University.

Critics Chime In, Popovic Responds

[Maryam Alkhawaja](#), director of the [Bahrain Center for Human Rights](#), said she had known Popovic for several years as an activist and had no knowledge of his outside relationships before the Wikileaks release of Stratfor emails.

“Srdja is someone I’ve met more than once. He was very supportive of the Bahrain revolution, supportive of the human rights fight,” Alkhawaja said in a phone interview. “When he gave me their information, that’s what surprised me the most.”

Alkhawaja said that at the time she wasn’t aware of what kind of firm Stratfor was, but she became immediately suspicious after reading Stratfor’s questions to her. She never corresponded with Stratfor due to what she felt was the suspicious nature of the emails coming from the firm.

“It was a series of really weird intelligence agency-like questions, given that they knew I was working in a human rights group. They were asking questions like, who’s funding the party coalition, how many members do they have, questions that even I didn’t know the answers to,” she said. “The fact that they asked questions like that, made me question the motive behind [the email I received](#). That’s why I never responded.”

“Whenever we get emails like that or were contacted by people who seemed very interested in asking intelligence agency-like questions, we usually block them, because we know they probably work for the government,” Alkhawaja continued. “Journalists know the kind of work we do so they wouldn’t ask those questions in the first place. I just found the email very weird and that’s why I actually never responded.”

In a Skype interview, one of Otpor!’s co-founders, who left the movement and asked to maintain his confidentiality, said his primary concern from the Wikileaks emails was that

Popovic was giving out activists' information to a third party without their prior consent.

An interview with Popovic sang a different tune about CANVAS. He stated, "We definitely wouldn't jeopardize any of our activists' safety, so we always follow their lead and never expose them to anybody without their consent."

Popovic also said CANVAS would speak to anyone and everyone—without any discrimination—about nonviolent direct action.

"CANVAS will present anywhere — to those committed to activism and nonviolent struggle, but also to those who still live in the Cold War era and think that tanks and planes and nukes shape the world, not the common people leading popular movements," he said.

"If we can persuade any decision maker in the world, in Washington, Kremlin, Tel Aviv or Damascus that it is nonviolent struggle that they should embrace and respect - not foreign military intervention, or oppression over own population - we would do that."

Yet, given Popovic's track-record—and specifically, who buttered his bread during the long professional career he pursued in activism—critics say Popovic fit like a glove at Stratfor.

"A group of Serbs cannot lead a protest movement anywhere outside Serbia, but his techniques are nonetheless instrumental in helping achieve certain political aims," Professor Sussman said in an interview. "He also serves as an intelligence gatherer in the process—of use to private and state intelligence agencies. That's what Stratfor saw as his use."

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