

Who's Behind the Pro-Guaidó Crowd Besieging Venezuela's D.C. Embassy?

By [Jeb Sprague](#) and [Alexander Rubinstein](#)

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The intimidation tactics by the pro-coup embassy besiegers not only failed to deter the peace activists around the embassy, they left Venezuela's D.C.-based opposition with a serious PR problem. After a week of hateful outbursts, a handful of marketing strategists emerged as de facto spokespeople for the mob.

After a rough and revealing start, the reins of the campaign to seize Venezuela's embassy in Washington are being taken over by a group of well-connected marketing and online strategists.

In this article, we will examine the backgrounds of these individuals, the platforms they use to disseminate their message, and the tactics they have employed to clamor for [an embassy seizure that violates international law](#). We will also address how they may stand to benefit directly from an escalation of [Washington's hybrid war](#) and a potential regime-change scenario in Venezuela.

Washington serves as a magnet for many elite and upper-middle-class professionals from countries that have been targeted by U.S. regime-change efforts. In their home countries, some of these elements may function as the shock troops or intellectual beacons of empire, forming the front lines of American-backed color-revolution-style destabilization campaigns. In the U.S., some upwardly mobile members of the diaspora also become lobbyists for regime change. They position themselves as the true voices of "the people" of their nation, while the poor and working class majorities of those countries are left behind, ignored by the corporate media and unable to travel north.

This sensibility is perfectly reflected by the crowd of pro-coup Venezuelan exiles and diaspora members that has besieged the Venezuelan Embassy in a bid to starve out the American activists who have staged a round-the-clock protest inside.

In early April, peace activists were invited by Venezuela's government into its embassy in D.C., after the Trump administration ordered the country's diplomats to depart. Over twenty wound up taking up residence in the embassy, hoping to prevent an illegal seizure of the building.

On April 30 - the same day self-proclaimed "president" Juan Guaidó staged a failed [military coup](#) - pro-Guaidó Venezuelans initiated their siege of the embassy. As they converged on the premises, some unleashed a [wave](#) of [violent](#), [misogynistic](#), and [racist](#) attacks on [peace activists](#) both inside and [outside](#) the building.

Some of the pro-Guaidó militants are believed to have since carried out [physical attacks](#), made [death threats](#), and harassed the [family members](#) of embassy defenders. Some are also believed to have committed acts of property [destruction, wrecked the tents of activists](#), and [ransacked](#) an embassy office [while](#) promoting [ultra-Zionism](#) and [praising](#) President Donald [Trump](#) and the [police](#). *TeleSUR*'s correspondent [Alina Duarte](#) has faced a torrent of threats from some of the pro-Guaidó extremists, returning home one night to find that someone had attempted to break into and enter her apartment.

All was going according to plan for the Embassy Protection Collective, until April 30 when the opposition descended on the building en masse. The Secret Service has allowed them to besiege the embassy, vandalize it and assault embassy protectors.

More: <https://t.co/lOyuBrAGf5> pic.twitter.com/s8lVcgC0wO

— MintPress News (@MintPressNews) [May 7, 2019](#)

The intimidation tactics not only failed to deter the [peace activists](#) around the embassy, they left Venezuela's D.C.-based opposition with a serious PR problem. After a week of hateful outbursts, a handful of marketing strategists emerged as de facto spokespeople for the mob. They are now delegated for [interviews](#) with national media outlets, deploying a combination of liberal-sounding language and identity politics to deflect from the presence of violent, sociopathic elements within the mob, some of whom will also be identified in this article.

The well-groomed spokespeople for regime change

Dilianna C. Bustillos (also known as Dillianna Bustillos Vivas) has become a [poster child](#) for the pro-Guaidó mob. A [senior manager](#) at Oracle, she previously worked for [MarketBridge](#) and for the advocate [marketing firm Influitive](#). Oracle, a computer technology corporation and one of the largest companies in the world, also [works closely](#) with aerospace and defense companies. In 2018 it had global revenues of \$39.83 billion.

Bustillos previously volunteered with [Visión Democrática](#), a pro-opposition Venezuelan lobbying outfit in D.C. that claims to focus on [“democracy promotion”](#) — code for regime change. Francisco Márquez, the executive director of [Visión Democrática](#), is the political advisor to Juan Guaidó's fake ambassador in Washington.

A [fellow](#) of the “Democracy in Hard Places Initiative” at Harvard's Ash School for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Marquez has held meetings with Vice President Mike Pence and is a key figure of the pro-coup Venezuelan lobby in Washington. [Visión Democrática](#) also employs [Carlos Figueroa](#), who attended a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) meeting in Washington on the potential for a [military invasion](#) of Venezuela.

In her media [interviews](#), Bustillos never reveals her top-level corporate marketing position nor her support for political groups that advocate for sanctions and U.S. [intervention](#).

Rather, she has presented herself as just another concerned [Venezuelan citizen](#), with nothing special to gain and no agenda beyond saving her country from the evildoers. In a [media interview](#) outside of the embassy, Bustillos claimed that she was “not for U.S.

intervention.” Such claims have been accepted at [face value](#) by the *New York Times*, which wrote: “Mr.

Guaidó’s supporters insist they are not making a case for American military intervention in Venezuela, but only want the Americans to leave a building that does not belong to them.”



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A screenshot from the Vice video featuring Dilianna C. Bustillos (AKA Dillianna Bustillos Vivas)

However, Bustillos’s Twitter timeline reveals that she [has](#) openly [advocated](#) for U.S. [sanctions](#), which we now know [collectively punish](#) the country’s population. She also openly supports Guaidó, who [himself](#) has suggested he would support a U.S. attack on his own country. Guaidó’s fake ambassador, Carlos Vecchio, has [asked the head](#) of the U.S. Southern Military Command to begin “strategic and operational planning” towards intervening in the country. Support for a U.S. invasion has also been voiced by [many other](#) pro-coup/pro-Guaidó Venezuelan-Americans outside the embassy including one of the leaders of the crowd, [Robert Nasser](#).

Some in the pro-Guaidó crowd [have claimed](#) that they want to see the embassy seized by Guaidó’s forces simply so they can renew their passports. However, an embassy for a government that does not exist and holds no territory in Venezuela would clearly have no ability to renew a passport.

In fact, seizing the embassy is aimed at setting up a parallel government and pushing for U.S. invasion or civil war, but under the guise of diplomatic officialdom. This is where the

contradiction of those who express themselves as the authentic voices of “the Venezuelan people” is exposed, as they support the [collective punishment](#) of Venezuelans through sanctions, internal destabilization, and U.S. intervention, while demanding that their countrymen and women be delivered from economic crisis.

NOT FIT for public consumption, [@askavenezuelan](#) deleted their tweet in which they admitted to me that the escualidos harassing and assaulting embassy protectors and vandalizing the building are members of the Venezuelan upper class [#AskAnUpperClassVenezuelanThug pic.twitter.com/4ooK4zy8vA](#)

— Alex Rubinstein (@RealAlexRubi) [May 6, 2019](#)

On cue, the pro-coup [lobby](#) tells people to [follow](#) the hashtag #AskAVenezuelan. *Caracas Chronicles*, a U.S.-based blog popular with anti-Chavista Venezuelan-Americans, has also [promoted](#) the [hashtag](#). This hashtag and the website under the same name ([www.AskAVenezuelan.com](#)) have quickly become a marketing mantra for the pro-Guaidólobby in D.C.

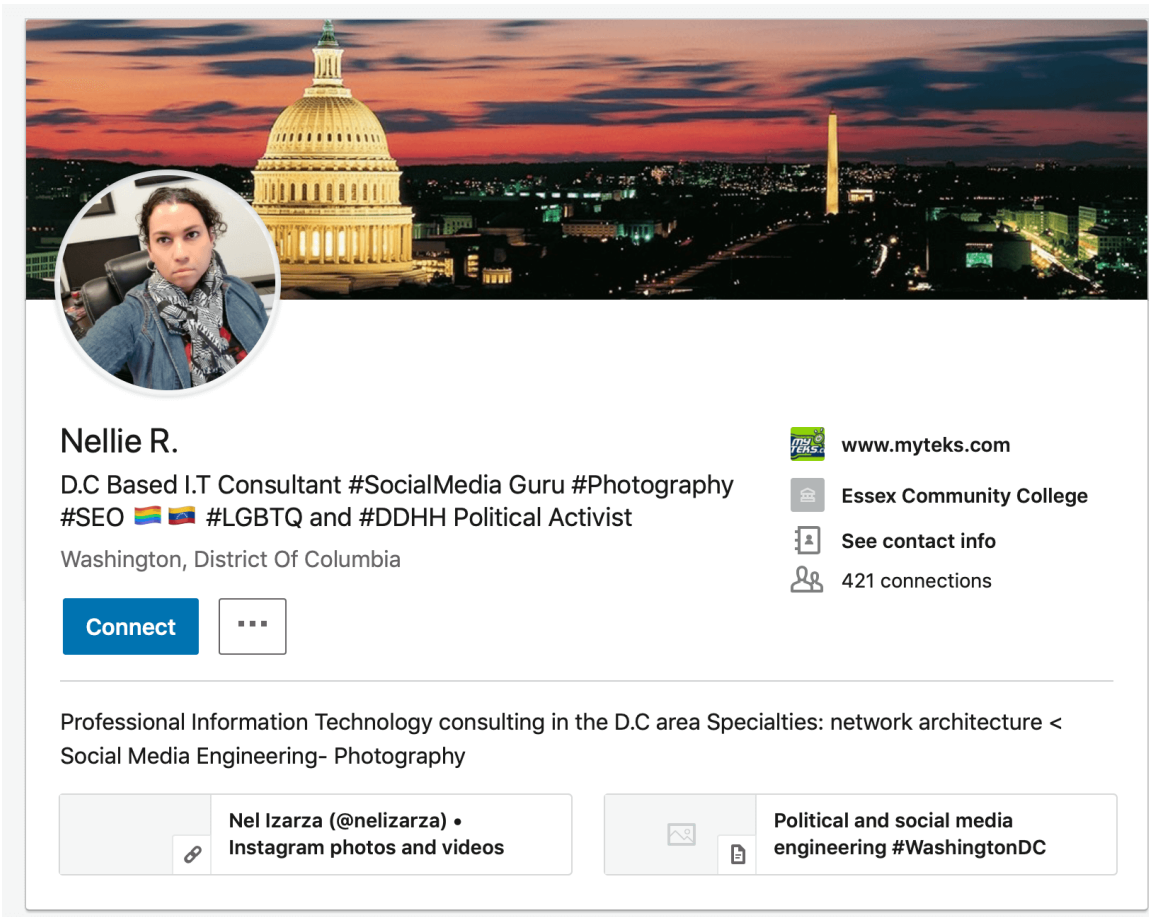
[Advanced marketing strategies](#) have also been used by others seeking to escalate conflict, such as with the professional Syrian-American activists who called in recent years for U.S. military intervention in Syria. Some Nicaraguan-American groups in D.C. have also successfully promoted the [financial strangulation](#) of their country by the U.S. empire through the NICA Act.

#AskAnUpperClassVenezuelan

So who owns the website [www.AskAVenezuelan.com](#)? According to a [search through godaddy.com](#), the [website](#) is owned by Nelli Romero, a computer repair consultant who also owns a company called MyTeks.com. On Twitter, Romero goes by [Nellie Belén Izarza](#). The company’s site on Zoominfo claims it has an annual revenue of [\\$4.2 million](#).

On her [Linkedin page](#), under the name Nelli R., she describes herself as an expert in “political and social media engineering” in Washington, D.C.

Romero has also worked as a consultant and lobbyist with the liberal [Sunlight Foundation](#) non-profit. Yet, in old social media posts, Romero [supported](#) and [hyped](#) up the [violent guarimba protests](#) that resulted in numerous deaths. One tactic familiar to the guarimbas was the *guaira*, where pro-coup militants tied [razor wire across streets](#) that then resulted in the deaths of motorcyclists and passersby, some by decapitation.

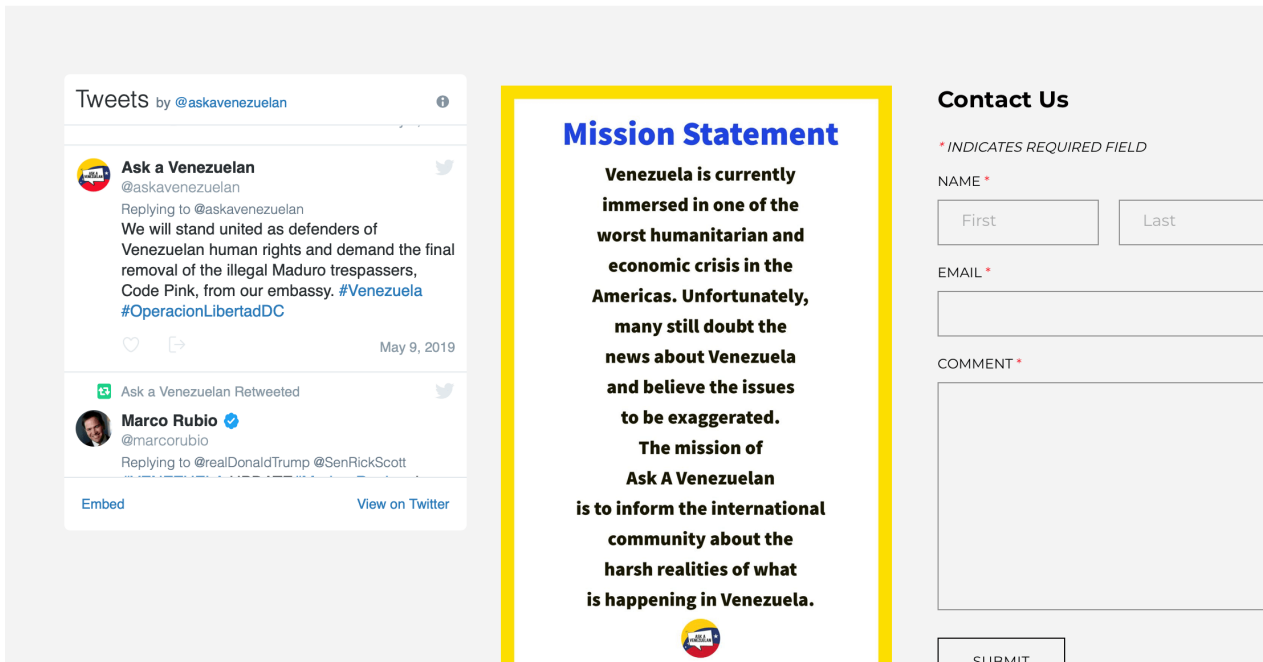


A screenshot of the LinkedIn page of Nellie Romero (AKA Nellie Belén Izarza)

In March of 2019, in apparent outrage that Washington had not yet authorized a military invasion of her homeland, [Romero tweeted](#) out (in Spanish): “With no U.S. Marine Corps there is no paradise.”

The pro-Guaidó spokespeople often insist to reporters that the group is neither right-wing nor left-wing in its political ideology, and that they do not want war or intervention. However, a quick glance over the “Ask a Venezuelan” website shows that it has repeatedly promoted Senator Marco Rubio’s (R-FL) calls for [U.S. intervention](#) and [brutal sanctions](#). Both Romero and Bustillos have often [retweeted](#) and [praised](#) Rubio, a neoconservative considered one of the most militaristic members of the U.S. Congress.

In a testament to how astroturfed the #AskAVenezuelan campaign is, the website admits that it was only started in response to a [massive mobilization](#) of anti-war activists in Washington who were protesting against Trump’s sanctions and intervention. In the [“About” section](#), they say they “witnessed first-hand the high levels of misinformation about the situation in Venezuela.”



A screenshot from the AskAvenzuelan.com website

With the Republican Party in the U.S. already fully invested in the coup, ensuring support for regime change within the Democratic Party establishment, along with favorable coverage from liberal-leaning media outlets, is at the top of the opposition's agenda. This is where Romero and Bustillos enter the picture, as both describe themselves as liberal [Democrats](#), even while they support the ultra-militarism of Marco Rubio. Romero has taken on an important lobbying role, [meeting recently](#) with Hillary Clinton's former 2016 running mate, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA).

For her part, Romero advocates for LGBTQ rights even while [apparently controlling](#) the #AskAVenezuelan brand. She is clearly [not happy](#) with those in the pro-Guaidó mob that have unleashed tirades of vitriolic homophobia against their political foes across the street and in the embassy. Together with Bustillos, she is appearing to do all she can to repackage the angry, entitled roar of a largely right-wing mob into a [bipartisan message](#) that appeals to a [war-weary](#) U.S. public.

Beyond the PR strategy that governs the embassy siege, D.C.'s pro-Guaidó lobby appears intent on consolidating a new status quo where Caracas is permanently isolated both diplomatically and economically, and an escalation of the conflict is just over the horizon.

The D.C. regime-change crew

Besides the marketing strategists, a number of well-connected Venezuelan exiles and diaspora members from the D.C. area have mobilized alongside some demonstrably violent figures each day outside the embassy.

One pro-coup activist seen on embassy grounds is [Emerson Hevia](#), a Senior Principal Architect at [the arms manufacturer Raytheon](#). The company is considered one of the biggest

[war profiteers](#) in human history.

"Venezuelans here and in Venezuela want US intervention," reads this opposition activist's sign pic.twitter.com/pFfZxPqwVM

— Alex Rubinstein (@RealAlexRubi) [May 1, 2019](#)

Also present at the protests has been [Moises Rendon](#), a fellow at the hawkish Center for Strategic and International Studies. Backed by NATO, defense contractors, and Gulf monarchies, this D.C. think tank was exposed by [The Grayzone](#) for hosting a private roundtable of Trump and Guaidó advisors to discuss the use of military force against Venezuela.

[Alejandro Perez Barrios](#) — a former employee of the [World Bank](#) and currently a senior manager at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank group — has also taken part in the embassy siege.

Another prominent pro-coup activist is [Carlos Alaya](#) (also known as Carlos Alfredo [Ayala Quintero](#)), a marketing strategist at the [Inter-American Development Bank](#) (IDB). One of Washington's most important international financial institutions (IFIs) promoting neoliberal austerity across the hemisphere, the IDB recently hired a key architect of the coup in Venezuela, [Ricardo Hausmann](#). The son of the President of the Venezuelan Association of Constitutional Law, Alaya has berated peace activists with vile epithets.

In fact, it has been common for many of the pro-coup activists to [verbally assault female CODEPINK members](#), hurl [racist invective](#) at [black](#) anti-war activists, [anti-Semitic slurs](#) at reporters, and play jingoistic [Trump speeches](#) on loudspeakers.

My experience so far with Venezuelan opposition has been abuse and hate. This guy and his friends just started calling me a "fucking bitch." I was just standing with other journalists watching the protest. You'll never get people on your side talking like that. pic.twitter.com/QhG9sXkVfN

— Rania Khalek (@RaniaKhalek) [April 30, 2019](#)

Another character known as "Mohamed" has [aggressively attempted to rip food away from](#) embassy protectors and briefly broke into the embassy, where he [ransacked](#) an entire room. He was then allowed by Secret Service police to walk freely among the mob outside, where he was seen providing private security to Guaidó's faux ambassador Carlos Vecchio.

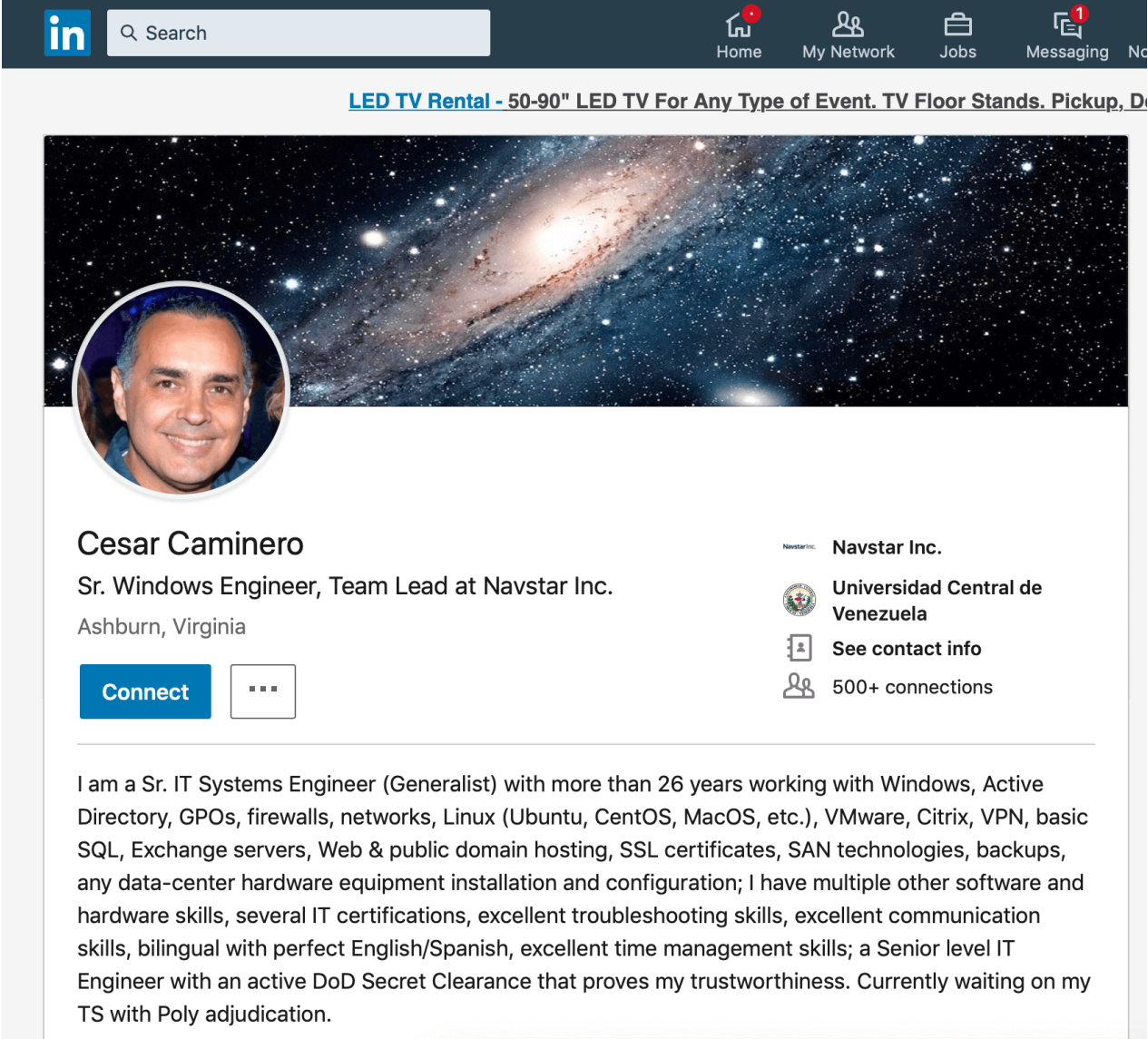
This woman with the opposition ran up to block a female Embassy Protection Collective member who was delivering food. "No food for anybody," she said.

Secret Service took control of the situation before saying everyone would have to leave the embassy at some point in time. pic.twitter.com/iCqcbDMKZO

— Alex Rubinstein (@RealAlexRubi) [May 1, 2019](#)

Cathy Caminero is a consistent participant of the pro-coup mob. She has been seen openly in public making [threatening gestures](#) against embassy defenders.

Her partner, Cesar Caminero, has also taken part in the pro-coup siege. On his [LinkedIn profile](#), Cesar Caminero states that he is a senior level IT Engineer with an active [Department of Defense](#) (DoD) secret clearance. DoD secret clearances are provided only to either DoD employees or approved employees of a DoD associated contractor. Caminero currently works as a [senior Windows engineer](#) team leader for Navstar Inc., a firm that provides IT and other services for U.S. intelligence agencies and the Department of State. [Video on Twitter](#) shows Cesar together with Guaidó's fake ambassador Carlos Vecchio.



The image is a screenshot of a LinkedIn profile for Cesar Caminero. At the top, there is a dark navigation bar with the LinkedIn logo, a search bar, and icons for Home, My Network, Jobs, and Messaging. Below the navigation bar, there is a banner image of a galaxy. On the left side of the banner is a circular profile picture of Cesar Caminero. To the right of the profile picture, the text reads: "Cesar Caminero", "Sr. Windows Engineer, Team Lead at Navstar Inc.", and "Ashburn, Virginia". Below this text are two buttons: a blue "Connect" button and a white button with three dots. To the right of the profile information, there are three company logos: Navstar Inc., Universidad Central de Venezuela, and a button labeled "See contact info". Below the logos, it says "500+ connections". At the bottom of the profile, there is a bio paragraph: "I am a Sr. IT Systems Engineer (Generalist) with more than 26 years working with Windows, Active Directory, GPOs, firewalls, networks, Linux (Ubuntu, CentOS, MacOS, etc.), VMware, Citrix, VPN, basic SQL, Exchange servers, Web & public domain hosting, SSL certificates, SAN technologies, backups, any data-center hardware equipment installation and configuration; I have multiple other software and hardware skills, several IT certifications, excellent troubleshooting skills, excellent communication skills, bilingual with perfect English/Spanish, excellent time management skills; a Senior level IT Engineer with an active DoD Secret Clearance that proves my trustworthiness. Currently waiting on my TS with Poly adjudication."

A screenshot of the LinkedIn page of Cesar Caminero

Perhaps the most prominent non-Venezuelan supporter of the embassy siege is a neighbor of the embassy. He is [Jim McCarthy](#) of CounterPoint Strategies. According to its website, CounterPoint has "[specialized in an aggressive, combative style of crisis management.](#)" Earlier in his career, McCarthy is said to have "handled a variety of Fortune 500 and foreign government accounts" for two major public relations agencies in Washington. With a slew of [wealthy clients](#), his company has been said to be "often at odds with Greenpeace" while "[McCarthy helped](#) pioneer the practice of using [Google ads to target journalists.](#)" On Twitter, McCarthy has denounced Venezuela's elected government and promotes an [interventionist](#)

[position](#).

Many in the pro-Guaidó mob appear to work for either international financial institutions, hawkish D.C. think tanks, or arms- and military-oriented contractors.

Candid audio of members of the opposition recorded surreptitiously and obtained by *MintPress News* expresses [fear of revealing](#) their identities [linked to their professions](#) (including one opposition protester who describes herself as being involved in “national security”).

Hailing from affluent backgrounds and overflowing with entitlement, the regime-change crew besieging the embassy does not mind brutalizing the anti-war activists that stand in their way. As numerous media reports show, the so-called “peaceful” and “pro-democracy” [mob](#) enjoys blaring 120 dB air horns [just inches away](#) from the [eardrums of anti-war activists, and flashing bright strobe and scuba lights directly in the eyes](#) of [embassy defenders](#), even [the elderly](#). Secret Service officers coordinating with Trump’s Department of State have stood by and done little to [nothing](#). Violating [international law](#), electricity has been cut off to the embassy and recently D.C. police themselves [began to actively stop](#) food and water from getting to those inside.

Loving school teacher, or just a big bully? [@MarlonEcorrea](#) has been intimidating, verbally abusing, and assaulting peace protectors since Tuesday. Don't you have papers to grade? [#handsoffvenezuela](#) [#nobloodforoil](#) pic.twitter.com/9C4d595gln

— Hasta La Victoria, Siempre (@SanrioSocialist) [May 4, 2019](#)

One anti-coup activist often present outside the embassy wondered if the fake ambassador, Vecchio, had hired a top-flight PR firm to control the messaging of the pro-coup mob. He explains:

Between Tuesday and Wednesday [May 7-8] there was a huge, concerted shift. People were seen coaching young Venezuelan-American women on how to cry and to wave their passports. They removed some of the more vitriolic opposition and dressed up some golpistas [coup supporters] in rainbow LGBTQ flags to downplay their rampant homophobia.”

On May 7, oppositionists wrapped themselves in at least a dozen pride flags, but the following day, the flags had totally disappeared.

Wear all the rainbow flags you like, but I've still been called a f*ggot and a sissy more times by the Opposition in the last week than I have in the previous two years, at least. <https://t.co/Ale1gVHgAE>

— Morgan Artyukhina (@LavenderNRed) [May 7, 2019](#)

As national media focuses its lenses on the delegated spokespeople of the pro-coup mob outside the Venezuelan Embassy, the [voices](#) of millions of [working-class Venezuelans](#) who

[voted](#) in large numbers for their [elected](#) government, or even just those who do not want to see an escalation of the conflict, [have been wholly ignored](#). Instead, Americans are instructed to consult a carefully conceived “Ask a Venezuelan” campaign that was designed by corporate marketing strategists. It is the brainchild of elite members of the diaspora with ties to the U.S. government, the military-industrial complex, and the Guaidó coup administration. And, as with a number of other PR campaigns, it is designed to distract Americans from the deeply unsettling reality unfolding in the heart of their nation’s capital.

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Featured image is from Embassy Protection Collective

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