

Axis of Logic

Finding Clarity in the 21st Century Mediaplex

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Buying the Press. Documents reveal multimillion-dollar funding to journalists and media in Venezuela

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Postcards from the Revolution

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US State Department documents declassified under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) evidence more than \$4 million USD in funding to journalists and private media in Venezuela during the last three years. This funding is part of the more than \$40 million USD international agencies are investing annually in anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela in an attempt to provoke regime change

The funding has been channeled directly by the State Department through three US agencies: Panamerican Development Foundation (PADF), Freedom House, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

In a blatant attempt to hide their activities, the State Department has censored the names of organizations and journalists receiving these multimillion-dollar funds. However, one document dated July 2008 mistakenly left unveiled the names of the principal Venezuelan groups receiving the funds: Espacio Publico (Public Space) and Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad (Institute for Press and Society "IPYS").

Espacio Publico and IPYS are the entities charged with coordinating the distribution of the millions in State Department funds to private media outlets and Venezuelan journalists working to promote US agenda.

The documents evidence that PADF has implemented programs in Venezuela dedicated to "enhancing media freedom and democratic institutions" and training workshops for journalists in the development and use of "innovative media technologies", due to the alleged "threats to

freedom of expression" and "the climate of intimidation and self-censorship among journalists and the media".

According to the documents, PADF's objective is to "strengthen independent journalists by providing them with training, technical assistance, materials and greater access to innovative internet-based technologies that expand and diversify media coverage and increase their capacity to inform the public on a timely basis about the most critical policy issues impacting Venezuela".

However, while on paper this may appear benign, in reality, Venezuela's corporate media outlets and journalists, together with US agencies, actively manipulate and distort information in order to portray the Venezuelan government as a "communist dictatorship" that "violates basic human rights and freedoms".

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Not only do media and journalists in Venezuela have a near-absolute freedom of expression, during the past decade, under the Chavez administration, hundreds of new media outlets, many community-based, have been created in order to foster and expand citizens' access to media. Community media was prohibited under prior governments, which only gave broadcasting access to corporations willing to pay big money to maintain information monopolies in the country.

Today, corporate media outlets and their journalists use communications power to publicly promote the overthrow of the Venezuelan government. The owners and executives of these media corporations form part of the Venezuelan elite that, under the reigns of Washington, ran the country for forty years before Chavez won the presidency in 1998.

What these documents demonstrate is that Washington not only is funding Venezuelan media, in clear violation of laws that prohibit this type of "propaganda" and "foreign interference", but also is influencing the way Venezuelan journalists perceive their profession and their political reality.

The State Department funding is not just used to create and aid media outlets that promote anti-Chavez propaganda, but also to capture Venezuelan journalists at the core - as students - in order to shape their vision of journalism and ensure their loyalty early on to US agenda.

FUNDING FOR ANTI-CHAVEZ WEB PAGES

One of the PADF programs, which received \$699,996 USD from the State Department in 2007, "supported the development of independent media in Venezuela" and "journalism via innovative media technologies". The documents evidence that more than 150 Venezuelan journalists were trained by US agencies and at least 25 web pages were created with US funding.

During the past two years, there has been a proliferation of web pages, blogs, and Twitter, MySpace and Facebook users in Venezuela, the majority of whom use these media outlets to promote anti-Chavez messages and disseminate distorted and false information about the country's political and economic reality.

Other programs run by the State Department have selected Venezuelan students and youth to receive training in the use of these new media technologies in order to create what they call a "network of cyber-dissidents" against the Venezuelan government.

For example, in April 2010, the George W. Bush Institute, together with Freedom House and the State Department, organized an encounter of "activists for freedom and human rights" and "experts in Internet" to analyze the "global movement of cyber-dissidents". Rodrigo Diamanti, anti-Chavez youth activist, was present at the event, which took place in Dallas, Texas and was presided over by George W. Bush himself, along with "dissidents" invited from Iran, Syria, Cuba, Russia and China.

In October last year, Mexico City hosted the II Summit of the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM), an organization created by the State Department to bring together select youth activists from countries of strategic importance to the US, along with the founders of new media technologies and representatives from different US agencies. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presided over the event, and anti-Chavez youth activists Yon Goicochea (Primero Justicia), Rafael Delgado, and Geraldine Alvarez, attended as special guests. All three are members of Futuro Presente, an organization created in Venezuela in 2008 with funding from the Cato Institute in Washington.

FUNDING TO UNIVERSITIES

The declassified State Department documents also reveal more than \$716,346 USD in funding via Freedom House in 2008, for an 18-month project seeking to “strengthen independent media in Venezuela”. This project also funded the creation of a “resource center for journalists” in an unnamed Venezuelan university. “The center will develop a community radio, website and training workshops”, all funded by the State Department.

Another \$706,998 USD was channeled through PADF to “promote freedom of expression in Venezuela” through a two-year project focusing on “new media technologies and investigative journalism”. “Specifically, PADF and its local partner will provide training and follow-up support in innovative media technologies and formats in several regions throughout Venezuela...This training will be compiled and developed into a university-level curriculum”.

Another document evidences three Venezuelan universities, Universidad Central de Venezuela (Central University of Venezuela “UCV”), Universidad Metropolitana (Metropolitan University) and Universidad Santa Maria (St. Mary’s University), which incorporated courses on media studies into their curriculums, designed and funded by the State Department. These three universities have been the principal launching pad for the anti-Chavez student movements during the past three years.

PADF also received \$545,804 USD for a program titled “Venezuela: The Voices of the Future”. This project, which allegedly lasted one year, was devoted to “developing a new generation of independent journalists through a focus on new media technologies”. PADF also funded various blogs, newspapers, radio stations and television stations in regions throughout Venezuela, to ensure the “publication” of reports and articles by the “participants” in the program.

USAID and PADF

More funds have been distributed to anti-Chavez political groups in Venezuela through USAID’s Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Caracas, which has an annual budget between \$5-7 million USD. These millions form part of the more than \$40 million USD given annually to opposition organizations in Venezuela by US, European and Canadian agencies, as evidenced in the May 2010 report, “Venezuela: Assessing Democracy Assistance” published by the National Endowment for Democracy’s World Movement for Democracy (WMD) and Spain’s FRIDE Institute.

PADF has been active in Venezuela since 2005 as one of USAID’s principal contractors. PADF was created by the State Department in 1962 and is “affiliated” with the Organization of American States (OAS). In Venezuela, PADF has been working to “strengthen local civil society groups”, and is “one of few major international groups that has been able to provide significant cash grants and technical assistance to Venezuelan NGOs”.

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