

U.S. Regime Change Blueprint

The US-funded **CANVAS**- the **Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies** – is a Belgrade-based "democracy promotion" organization funded by the US government through **National Endowment for Democracy (NED)** - a CIA cut-out that functions as the US government's main arm of promoting regime change.

CANVAS has trained thousands of U.S.-aligned youth activists in countries where the West seeks regime change. This group reportedly hosted Guaido and the key leaders of his *Popular Will* party for a series of training sessions, fashioning them into a "**Generation 2007**" determined to foment resistance to then-President Hugo Chávez and sabotage his plans to implement "21st century socialism" in Venezuela.

CANVAS produced a September 2010 memo on exploiting electricity outages and urged the opposition "to take advantage of the situation...towards their needs" and identifies the potential collapse of the country's electrical sector as "a watershed event that would likely have the impact of galvanizing public unrest in a way that no opposition group could ever hope to generate." The memo has special relevance today as Guaido moves to exploit nationwide blackouts caused by a major failure at the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant at Guri dam– a crisis that Venezuela's government blames on U.S. sabotage.

The memo was authored by Srdja Popovic founder of **CANVAS**. In it Popovic declared, "A key to Chavez's current weakness is the decline in the electricity sector." Popovic explicitly identified the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant as a friction point, emphasizing that "water levels at the Guri dam are dropping, and Chavez has been unable to reduce consumption sufficiently to compensate for the deteriorating industry."

Speculating on a "grave possibility that some 70 percent of the country's electricity grid could go dark as soon as April 2010," the **CANVAS** leader stated that "an opposition group would be best served to take advantage of the situation and spin it against Chavez and towards their needs." Flash forward to March 2019, and the scenario outlined by Popovic is playing out almost exactly as he had imagined. On March 7, just days after Guaido's return from Colombia, where he participated in the failed and demonstrably violent Feb. 23 attempt to ram a shipment of U.S. aid across the Venezuelan border, around 5 P.M., the Simon Bolivar Hydroelectric Plant experienced a total and still unexplained collapse. Residents of Caracas and throughout Venezuela were immediately plunged into darkness. At 5:18 P.M., a clearly excited Rubio took to Twitter to announce the blackout and claim that "backup generators have failed." It was unclear how Rubio had obtained such specific information so soon after the outage occurred. According to Jorge Rodriguez, the communications minister of Venezuela, **local authorities did not know if backup generators had failed at the time of Rubio's tweet.**

Back in Caracas, Guaido immediately set out to exploit the situation, just as his **CANVAS** trainers had advised over eight years before. Taking to Twitter just over an hour after Rubio, Guaido declared, "the



light will return when the usurpation of Maduro ends." Like Pompeo, the self-declared president framed the blackouts as part of a regime change strategy, not an accident or error. Two days later, Guaido was at the center of opposition rally he convened in affluent eastern Caracas, bellowing into a megaphone: "Article 187 when the time comes. We need to be in the streets, mobilized. It depends on us, not on anybody else." Article 187 establishes the right of the National Assembly "to authorize the use of Venezuelan military missions abroad or foreign in the country." Upon his mention of the constitutional article, Guaido's supporters responded, "**Intervention! Intervention!**"

The Venezuelan government has placed the blame squarely on Washington, accusing it of sabotage through a cyber-attack on its electrical infrastructure. Key players in the U.S.-directed coup attempt have done little to dispel the accusation. In a tweet on March 8, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo framed the electricity outage as a pivotal stage in US plans for regime change: At noon on March 7, during a hearing on Venezuela at the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee, Sen. Marco Rubio explicitly called for the U.S. to stir "widespread unrest," declaring that it "needs to happen" in order to achieve regime change. "Venezuela is going to enter a period of suffering no nation in our hemisphere has confronted in modern history," Rubio proclaimed.

The Regime Change specialists at **CANVAS** are a spinoff of **OTPOR**, a Serbian protest group founded by Popovic in 1998 at the University of Belgrade. **Otpor**, which means "resistance" in Serbian, was the student group that worked alongside U.S. soft power organizations to mobilize the protests that eventually toppled the late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

CANVAS "may have also received CIA funding and training during the 1999/2000 anti-Milosevic struggle," according to leaked internal emails from **Stratfor**, an intelligence firm known as the shadow CIA. A **Stratfor** staffer noted that after they ousted Milosevic, "the kids who ran **OTPOR** grew up, got suits and designed **CANVAS**... or in other words a 'export-a-revolution' group that sowed the seeds for a **NUMBER of color revolutions. They are still hooked into U.S. funding and basically go around the world trying to topple dictators and autocratic governments (ones that U.S. does not like).**"

Stratfor subsequently revealed that **CANVAS "turned its attention to Venezuela"** in 2005, after training opposition movements that led **pro-NATO regime**

change operations across Eastern Europe. In September 2010, as Venezuela headed for a parliamentary election, **CANVAS** produced a series of memos outlining the plans they had hatched with "non-formal actors" like Guaido and his cadre of student activists to bring down Chavez. "This is the first opportunity for the opposition to get back into a position of power," Popovic wrote at the time. While the scenario Popovic envisioned failed to materialize in 2010, it perfectly describes the situation gripping Venezuela today as an opposition leader cultivated by **CANVAS** seeks to spin the crisis against Maduro while calling on the military to break ranks.

Since the exposure of the deep ties between **CANVAS** and Guaido's *Popular Will* party, Popovic has attempted to publicly distance himself from his record of training Venezuela's opposition. However, Popovic said, in a report in *Waging Nonviolence*, an organization of which he is a Board member, that indeed he wished the Venezuelan revolt every success, and **considered Guaido a friend.**

Popovich, in a response to *Balkan Insight*, another **National Endowment for Democracy** soft CIA front, admitted even more. "It is no secret that many representatives of the Venezuelan democratic movement are my friends, that we have known each other for years and have talked countless times about the political situation in this beautiful but unhappy country," He added that he had talked and wrote about this matter many times, so "**this is no secret**".

"Of course, I would do everything in my power to help Guaido to fight against the regime that even the army can no longer defend against its own citizens, because they live on the verge of existence in the country **with enormous natural resources.**" Popovic also wished "**my friend Juan Guaido**" success in his fight, calling him "a high-quality, young and educated man recognized even by the country's first neighbors, such as Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, and **the entire democratic world as a true and legitimate representative of Venezuela**".

Aside from the fact that these countries hardly represent the "democratic world", Popovich also had very intimate connections with **Stratfor**. On the site *Waging Nonviolence*, it was revealed that Popovich's wife-to-be, Marija Stanisavljevic, worked for a year in a part time job as an "open source intelligence monitor" for **Stratfor**. Two **Stratfor** employees attended the 2011 wedding of the couple, with another invited but unable to make it. This according to comments by Karner Blue on the *Waging Nonviolence* site, who also revealed that Popovich gave at least one presentation for **Stratfor** and provided and sought analyses from **Stratfor** in his position at **CANVAS**,

Today, however, Popovic's 2010 memo on exploiting electricity outages reads like a blueprint for the strategy that Guaido and his patrons in Washington have actively implemented. Whether or not the blackout is the result of external sabotage, it represents the "watershed event" that **CANVAS** has prepared its Venezuelan cadres for.

Max Blumenthal

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Hugo Chávez said that his every move would be subject to the will of the people.

In eight years, Chávez won eight elections and referendums: a world record. Every major Cháveza reform was voted on, notably a new constitution of which 71 percent of the people approved each of the 396 articles that enshrined unheard of freedoms, such as Article 123, which for the first time recognized the human rights of mixed-race and black people, of whom Chávez was one.

His audiences understood this well and expressed themselves with dignity, seldom with deference. Ordinary people regarded Chávez and his government as their first champions: as theirs.

This was especially true of the indigenous, mestizos and Afro-Venezuelans, who had been held in historic contempt by Chávez' immediate predecessors and by those who today live far from the barrios, in the mansions and penthouses of East Caracas, who commute to Miami where their banks are and who regard themselves as "white." They are the powerful core of what the media calls "the opposition." The Chávez government's initial policies were moderate, capitalist and center-left. They had much in common with those of contemporary Latin American leftists like Brazilian president Lula da Silva. Chávez initially believed that capitalism was still a valid economic model for Venezuela.

Plan Bolívar 2000 was the first of the Bolivarian Missions enacted under his administration- The plan involved around 40,000 Venezuelan soldiers engaged in door-to-door anti-poverty activities, including mass vaccinations, food distribution in slum areas, and education. The program also transported thousands of poor and ill Venezuelans at cost by military cargo planes and helicopters to seek employment and medical care. Chávez' 3 part vision of **Plan Bolívar**:

Pro-País; which would involve the armed forces working in the capacity of social service.

Pro-Patria; which would have the military helping local communities help themselves.

Pro-Nación; which would help the country to a more self-sufficient economy that can sustain itself.

Using record-high oil revenues of the 2000s, his government nationalized key industries, created participatory democratic **Communal Councils** and implemented social programs known as the **Bolivarian missions** to expand access to food, housing, healthcare and education.

