

Venezuela leader blasts U.S. report

The Miami Herald
Jul. 12, 2006

CARACAS, Venezuela - President Hugo Chavez rejected a U.S. government report accusing Venezuela of funding efforts by Cuba's Fidel Castro to subvert democracy in Latin America, saying it indicated Washington's aggressive intentions toward Havana.

"They've launched what I consider a new imperialist threat," Chavez said Tuesday in a televised speech. "They've publicized a plan of transition, they think Fidel is going to die."

"This is what I say to U.S. imperialism: Now is when Venezuela will support the Cuban revolution," Chavez added. "Long live Fidel - brother, comrade and partner!"

Chavez was responding to Monday's release of a report by the Presidential Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba that accused Havana of forestalling a transition to democracy in the communist country and charged that Chavez is using Venezuela's vast oil revenues to prop up Castro.

"There are clear signs the (Cuban) regime is using money provided by the Chavez government in Venezuela to reactivate its networks in the hemisphere to subvert democratic governments," the report said.

Denouncing moves by the Castro government to strengthen its grip on power, it said "the current regime in Havana is working with like-minded governments, particularly Venezuela, to build a network of political and financial support designed to forestall any external pressure to change."

The commission urged the U.S. government to spend \$800 million to help non-governmental groups hasten a transition to democracy.

Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel said the report was an announcement of Washington's "intention to attack and subjugate" Cuba.

"The implicit message ... must not be underestimated," Rangel said in a statement Tuesday. "It confirms a policy to which we must be alert."

Chavez was defiant as he warned Washington to watch its own back.

"Instead of thinking about a plan of transition for revolutionary Cuba or revolutionary Venezuela, they should be developing a plan of transition for themselves because this century the U.S. empire will end," he said.

Chavez's close friendship with Castro has long troubled Washington, which considers the Venezuelan leader a destabilizing force in the region, although he was elected democratically. One of President Bush's fiercest critics, Chavez has inked in a series of cooperative deals with Cuba.