

# Venezuela Says It Seized 4 Spies; U.S. Embassy Denies Knowledge

The New York Times  
August 20, 2006

CARACAS, [Venezuela](#), Aug. 19 — President [Hugo Chávez](#) said that the authorities here had captured four people who were spying for the United States, and he taunted the Bush administration for making Venezuela a target of high-level intelligence scrutiny.

Speaking at a campaign rally on Friday night in western Venezuela, Mr. Chávez, who has made attacks on the United States a staple of his re-election campaign, ridiculed the administration's establishment of a mission manager for intelligence on Venezuela and Cuba. J. Patrick Maher, a longtime veteran of the [C.I.A.](#), was named to the post on Friday.

Iran and North Korea are the only other countries assigned such senior intelligence managers, who are not expected to directly oversee intelligence operations or analysis but rather guide these activities on a strategic level.

"They selected Jack the Ripper," Mr. Chávez said, referring to Mr. Maher. "Whatever their plan is, we stand ready to defeat it."

Accusations of spying have become commonplace in Venezuela in the past two years, as Mr. Chávez's government grows more explicit in its criticism of the United States, emboldened by climbing oil revenues and a perception that his opponents stand little chance of defeating him in the December election.

Authorities have offered little evidence in relation to the various spying charges, but the government has often pointed to the tacit support the Bush administration gave to a coup that briefly ousted Mr. Chávez in 2002.

The new accusations contained few details, though Mr. Chávez did say: "I've caught four of their spies, four, and I've put them back in their hands. Not long ago we caught a very beautiful woman in Valencia, taking photos."

American officials here appear to be growing used to such charges, after Venezuela's expulsion in February of a naval attaché, contending he was a spy.

"We have no idea what the president is talking about," Brian Penn, a United States Embassy spokesman, said Saturday of the new charges.