

# Chávez fires back, calls Bush a `dictator'

**Hugo Chávez scoffed at President Bush's statement that the Venezuelan leader poses a threat to democracy.**

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**CARACAS** - Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez dismissed Washington's concerns that Venezuela's democracy is under threat, saying a "dictatorship" led by President Bush poses a true threat to democracy around the world.

Condemning the war in Iraq, the Venezuelan leader said that Bush and John Negroponte, a former director of national intelligence who is designated for the No. 2 position in the State Department, should be tried for "war crimes" committed by the U.S. military across the globe.

"The two of them are criminals. They should be tried and thrown in prison for the rest of their days," Chávez told a news conference.

"If he had any dignity, the president of the United States would quit. The U.S. president doesn't have the political or moral capacity to govern," he added.

Chávez was responding to comments made on Wednesday by Bush, who said he was concerned about Venezuela's democracy.

"I am concerned about the undermining of democratic institutions. And we're working to help prevent that from happening," Bush said in an interview with Fox News Channel.

Relations between Caracas and Washington have been tense recently, with U.S. officials accusing Chávez -- a close ally of Cuban leader Fidel Castro -- of becoming increasingly authoritarian and Chávez accusing U.S. officials of scheming against his left-leaning government.

Last week, Chávez threatened to expel U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield for "meddling" in Venezuela's domestic affairs.

Brownfield has called for improved relations between the two countries, but said he's ready to leave if the Chávez administration decides to expel him.

Chávez fiercely denied that his initiative to accelerate changes in broad areas of Venezuelan society through presidential decree, which was approved by the pro-Chávez Congress on Wednesday, would endanger his country's democracy.

"The people gave me the power I have, and it's within the framework of a constitution," Chávez said.