

By: Tim Padgett - Time Magazine

TIME: Why do you attack President George W. Bush with such jolting language?

CHAVEZ: I believe words have great weight, and I want people to know exactly what I mean. **I'm not attacking President Bush; I'm simply counterattacking. Bush has been attacking the world, and not just with words--with bombs. When I say these things I believe I'm speaking for many people, because they too believe this moment is our opportunity to stop the threat of a U.S. empire that uses the U.N. to justify its aggression against half the world. In Bush's speech to the U.N., he sounded as if he wants to be master of the world.** I changed my original speech after reading his.

TIME: But doesn't your rhetoric--referring to Bush, for example, as an "alcoholic"--risk alienating potential allies?

CHAVEZ: First of all, **Bush has called me worse: tyrant, populist dictator, drug trafficker, to name a few. I was simply telling a truth that people should know about this President, a man with gigantic power.**

TIME: Is all of this mostly for domestic consumption back in Venezuela?

CHAVEZ: No. American author Noam Chomsky in his book [Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance] talks of two superpowers in today's world--one is the U.S., which aggressively wants to dominate the world, and the other is global public opinion. I don't consider what I'm saying personal attacks on President Bush--I want to wake up U.S. and global public opinion about him.

TIME: Do your feelings about Bush reflect your feelings toward America in general?

CHAVEZ: No. I revere America as the nation of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and Mark Twain--who was a great anti-imperialist, who opposed U.S. adventurism in the Spanish-American War.

TIME: You often speak of the link between U.S. foreign policy and its appetite for oil.

CHAVEZ: Bush wanted Iraq's oil, and I believe he wants Venezuela's oil. The blame for high oil prices lies in the consumer model of the U.S. Its reckless oil consumption is a form of suicide.

TIME: You said recently that you believe the "Bolívar Doctrine is finally replacing the Monroe Doctrine" on your watch. Why?

CHAVEZ: For two centuries in this hemisphere we've experienced a confrontation between two theses--America's Monroe Doctrine, which says the U.S. should exercise hegemony over all the other republics, and the doctrine of Simón Bolívar, which envisioned a great South American republic as a counterbalance. Bush has spread the Monroe thesis globally, to make the U.S. the police of the world--if you're not with us, he says, you're against us. We're simply doing the same now with the Bolívar thesis--a doctrine of more equality and autonomy among nations, more equilibrium of power.

TIME: What's the difference between your "socialism for the 21st century" and past attempts to fix the region's economic inequality?

CHAVEZ: When I was released from prison [in 1994] and began my political life, I naively took as a reference point Tony Blair's proposal for a "third way" between capitalism and socialism--capitalism with a human face. Not anymore. After seeing the failure of Washington-backed capitalist reforms in Latin America, I no longer think a third way is possible. Capitalism is the way of the devil and exploitation, of the kind of misery and inequality that destroys social values. If you really look at things through the eyes of Jesus Christ--who I think was the first socialist--only socialism can really create a genuine society.

TIME: Yet one slogan of your re-election campaign is "Against Chávez, Against the People." You also seem to have taken on a with-me-or-against-me stance.

CHAVEZ: The difference is ethics and morals. We're not threatening anyone. That slogan is simply a call for conscious reflection on national unity. We're not going to enforce it by bombing or invading anyone.

TIME: Critics have noted that while you were free to slam President Bush on U.S. soil, a new defamation law in Venezuela makes people subject to criminal prosecution for slander against officials like you.

CHAVEZ: They need to visit Venezuela. If you think Chávez is intimidating free expression, just watch television there--my God, devil is the least of things the opposition is allowed to call me on the air.

TIME: Could Venezuela play an interlocutor role between Iran and the U.S.? You and President Bush have some things in common--you both hail from cowboy country and enjoy Clint Eastwood movies.

CHAVEZ: I like Danny Glover movies better. But I don't believe there is anyone who can play the interlocutor with a leader who considers himself master of the world, as Bush does. Before the 2002 coup attempt against me--which Bush

backed--various Presidents around the world tried to be interlocutors between Bush and Chávez. I said sure, please give him my regards. But they found it a waste of time with this U.S. President. I could talk to Clinton, but not Bush.