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At UN, Venezuela's Chavez Smells Hope, Not Sulfur

Venezuela's Chavez Tells UN He Smells Hope With 'devil' President Bush Out Of Office

(AP) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez told the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday that he smells hope not sulfur, a small compliment for Barack Obama given that he branded then President George W. Bush "the devil" when he last addressed the world body in 2006.

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"It doesn't smell of sulfur. It's gone. It smells of something else. It smells of hope and you have hope in your heart," Chavez said during a rambling, 57-minute address where he mentioned close friend and former Cuban President Fidel Castro more than 100 times.

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Though at times he waved his arms, shook his fist and pointed for emphasis, Chavez was largely calm and jovial during the speech. He denounced capitalism as being a chief cause of global climate change and accused Obama of making lofty promises but failing to live up to them, asking "doesn't it seem like there are two Obamas?"

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During a raucous press conference after he finished speaking, Chavez said, "I hope the two Obamas join and become one, the one who gave the speech yesterday."

The Venezuelan president praised Obama's Tuesday calls at the General Assembly for the world's most-powerful nations to work for global peace, but Chavez also said U.S. policy continues to provoke war.

Obama and Chavez shook hands during the Summit of the Americas in April and Chavez told reporters Thursday he "felt there was chemistry" between them.

"I don't want to attack him personally," he said. "I don't want to say he's a fake."

But Chavez took his bombastic rhetoric a step further when addressing the General Assembly, referring to Washington-backed free-market reforms when he demanded to know, "what would it be like in Latin America today if the Americans had not imposed their model with firepower and blood?"

"Imperialism must end!" he said.

A populist and the leader of a self-declared "socialist revolution" in Venezuela, Chavez also urged Obama to "come over to the socialist side. Come join the Axis of Evil over here." He was only half-joking.

Though tensions have eased somewhat since Bush left office, relations between Venezuela and Washington have long been frosty. The United States accuses Chavez of being a threat to stability in Latin America and the Venezuelan constantly criticizes what he calls American "imperialism" in the region.

Chavez did not mention Bush by name, but got in another dig when he said "please, don't anybody throw a shoe at me!" and laughingly suggested that Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, an ally, had been preparing to do just that.

On his last trip to Baghdad, an Iraqi journalist stood up at a press conference and hurled both shoes at Bush, who ducked.

Chavez also discussed the June military coup that toppled the elected president of Honduras, but claimed during his speech that Israel had recognized the new government that seized power there.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor denied that, telling The Associated Press, "Chavez is all the time trying to spread these false rumors to try to gain some kind of propaganda advantage."

At the news conference, Chavez was asked about accusations his government has used licensing rules to silence opposition radio and television stations. "They defame me, they say I don't know how many things about me."

But during the speech, he had kept things lighter. At the 51-minute mark, Chavez quipped "I think I've spoken for 10 minutes." Speeches are supposed to be limited to a quarter hour.

Chavez also dedicated several minutes at the beginning of his remarks to a review of Oliver Stone's new documentary "South of the Border," which focuses on the "progressive revolution" Chavez and other leftist leaders are leading in South America.

Venezuela's president claimed Stone told him that U.S. theater operators have conspired to keep the film from being distributed in America, though it made its national debut at New York's Lincoln Ceter Wednesday night.

Chavez's words did not cause nearly as many fireworks as those of Moammar Gadhafi, who unleashed

a 96-minute tirade Wednesday in his first speech before the body in his 40 years as ruler of Libya. He declared the U.N. Security Council "should be called the 'terror council.'"

"I'm not going to speak any more than Gadhafi. Gadhafi has said everything that had to be said," Chavez opined.

Still, the Venezuelan leader has a history of causing a stir at international summits. In front of the U.N. General Assembly three years ago, he called Bush "the devil" no less than eight times.

At a summit in Chile a year later, he branded Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar a "fascist," prompting that country's king to angrily declare "why don't you just shut up?"

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