

Chávez warns Colombia not to allow U.S. base

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CARACAS: President Hugo Chávez warned Colombia not to allow a U.S. military base on its border with Venezuela, saying he would regard such an act as “aggression.”

Chávez said Wednesday that he would not let the U.S.-backed Colombian government establish an American military base in La Guajira, a region spanning northeastern Colombia and northwestern Venezuela.

The Venezuelan leader said that if Colombia allowed the base, his government would revive an old territorial conflict and claim the entire region.

“We will not allow the Colombian government to give La Guajira to the empire,” Chávez said, referring to the United States in a speech before an auditorium of uniformed soldiers. “Colombia is launching a threat of war at us.”

Chávez said Washington’s top diplomat in Bogotá, Ambassador William Brownfield, recently suggested that a U.S. military base in Ecuador could be moved to La Guajira.

President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, a close Chávez ally, has repeatedly said that he will not renew a 10-year lease on the base in the Pacific port of Manta when it expires next year.

Surveillance flights the United States runs from Manta represent 60 percent of drug interdiction in the eastern Pacific.

Diplomatic relations between Caracas and Bogotá worsened last week when Colombia unveiled documents allegedly showing that Chávez sought to arm and finance Colombian rebels. Chávez denies the allegation.

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