

Colombia: US Surrounds Venezuela With Military Bases

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, July 21, 2009

Associated Press 21 July 2009

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Chavez objects to more US troops in Colombia

CARACAS, Venezuela: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is objecting to Colombia's decision to let the United States increase its military presence in the neighboring country.

Chavez said Tuesday that Colombia's plan to accommodate more U.S. troops at its air and naval bases is "a threat against us."

"They are surrounding Venezuela with military bases," he said in a televised speech.

Chavez said late Monday that Colombia's plan "obliges us to review our relations" with the U.S.-allied neighbor.

A fifth round of U.S.-Colombia negotiations on an accord are set for next week.

Chavez has often accused the United States of plotting to overthrow or undermine him. His relations with Washington remain strained even though he and President Barack Obama's administration recently restored their ambassadors, seeking more dialogue. Chavez expelled the U.S. envoy last year.

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe said on Monday that his government is aiming to reach an agreement for what defense officials say would be the use of three airfields and two navy bases.

"The accord is to strengthen Colombian military bases, not to open U.S. bases," Uribe said in a speech to congress, saying the agreement is necessary to reinforce security within Colombia.

Chavez called such talk evasive. "Of course they use euphemisms and say they aren't Yankee bases, but rather Colombian bases and that they could come. They're going to be there permanently," he said Monday, according to the state-run Bolivarian News Agency.

Most details of the anticipated U.S.-Colombian agreement have not been divulged.

More than \$4 billion in U.S. aid since 2000 has helped Colombia fight leftist rebels....

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