

Iran, Venezuela enter into military alliance

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Iran and Venezuela have moved to strengthen their cooperation in defense areas, a move that may ruffle feathers in the United States.

Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammed-Najjar met with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Thursday and pledged Tehran's full military support for the Caracas government.

"Iran pledges its full support to promote the Venezuelan military's defense capabilities in the framework of mutual defensive agreements," Brigadier General Mohammad-Najjar said.

Following his meeting with the president, the Iranian minister met with Vice President Ramon Carrizalez, who is also Venezuela's acting defense minister.

The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on military cooperation which encompassed "training and mutual exchange of military experiences".

Carrizalez for his part said, "Venezuela is fully determined to strengthen defense ties with Iran."

While Tehran and Caracas enjoy close ties, this is the first time that an Iranian defense minister has visited the Latin American state since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The prospects of deep defense ties between Iran and Venezuela is not expected to receive warm welcomes in the White House, as the US has on many occasions expressed opposition to Tehran establishing a foothold in its "strategic back yard."

Venezuela has been a vociferous defender of Iran and its nuclear program as the neighboring United States has opposed the Islamic Republic and its nuclear activities.

The tightening of defense alliance between Venezuela and Iran comes as the two countries had previously signed an array of agreements, pledging to work together in oil exploration, building low-income housing and assembling tractors and bicycles, among other ventures.

The industrial cooperation between the two "non US allies" disappointed the administration of former US president George W. Bush, who at one point accused Iran of building a nuclear plant in Venezuela.

The Venezuelan President later ridiculed the idea of Iran making a nuclear plant in Venezuela and called the very first bike produced at a joint Iranian-Venezuelan factory "the atomic bicycle".

"The US claims that the factory Iran is building for Venezuela in the state of Cojedes is a

nuclear plant and not a bicycle factory; therefore, we will call its first product 'The Atomic Bicycle,'" Chavez said in June 2008.

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