

Putin wants closer military ties with Venezuela

By [Global Research](#)

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22/07/2008 20:23 NOVO-OGARYOVO, July 22 (RIA Novosti) – Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Tuesday that he hopes military ties between the countries will strengthen.

Chavez, who is currently on an official visit to Russia, discussed political, economic and defense cooperation with the premier at Putin's residence near Moscow.

"We have recently been strengthening the legal base for our cooperation, searching for ways to diversify our relations through new cooperation areas, namely transport, space, high-tech production, and of course military and technical cooperation," Putin said.

During the meeting, Putin accepted an invitation from Chavez to visit Venezuela.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with Chavez earlier in the day for talks focusing on arms and energy deals.

On arriving in Moscow, Chavez called for Russia and Venezuela to become strategic partners in oil and defense, something he said would "guarantee Venezuela's sovereignty, which is currently being threatened by the United States."

Venezuela has bought over 50 combat helicopters, 24 Su-30MK2 fighters, and 100,000 AK-103 rifles from Russia, and also holds a license for their production. The current contracts are worth about \$4 billion.

Moscow plans to start supplying Venezuela with at least ten Mi-28N helicopters in the second half of 2009.

The two countries have also negotiated the delivery of three Russian Project 636 Kilo-class diesel submarines and at least 20 Tor-M1 air defense missile systems to Caracas. Contracts for these two deals, if signed, may be worth another \$1 billion.

In line with the state program for the modernization of the armed forces until 2012, Venezuela is planning to spend about \$30 billion in the next four years on the purchase of weaponry abroad.

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