

Venezuela's Chavez sees CIA hand in Iran unrest

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Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has accused the CIA of being behind anti-government protests rocking Iran, and repeated his support for Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Chavez, who has tried to cultivate ties with the Islamic republic, said the "imperial hand" of the US Central Intelligence Agency — and of Europe — was behind post-election clashes that had killed at least 17 people.

"People are in the streets, some are dead, they have snipers, and behind this is the CIA, the imperial hand of European countries and the United States," he said, "from my point of view that is what is happening in Iran."

Chavez made his comments late Wednesday on the margins of a gathering of Latin American leftist leaders in Maracay, central Venezuela.

"Ahmadinejad won the elections legally, we are absolutely sure we know quite a lot about Iranian politics," Chavez said.

Iran has also claimed the CIA is behind protests in Iran.

Chavez' comments echo earlier support for the incumbent Iranian president, who the Iranian state says won re-election earlier this month.

In a radio and television address last Sunday Chavez said: "We call on the world to respect Iran because there are attempts to undermine the strength of the Iranian revolution."

Venezuela announced on Wednesday that they and the United States had decided to exchange ambassadors, ending a diplomatic spat that led to tit-for-tat expulsions of the envoys in September.

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