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Russia rebuffs U.S. call to rethink \$1bn Venezuela arms deal

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RYAZAN REGION, July 26 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's defense minister ruled out Wednesday reconsidering a \$1 billion contracts on supplies of military planes and helicopters to Venezuela.

Tom Casey, a deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department, said Tuesday that President George Bush's administration wanted Russia to review the deals. He said the weapons purchases Venezuela planned exceeded the country's demands and did not contribute to regional stability.

But Sergei Ivanov, who is also a deputy prime minister of Russia, said, "Reviewing the contract is absolutely out of the question. In my opinion, the 24 planes and the number of helicopters recorded in the contract are not excessive for the defense of a small country such as Venezuela."

"We will honor the contract," Ivanov said, adding that Venezuela had no restrictions on arms supplies.

The South American country's outspoken president, Hugo Chavez, is touring defense-industry plants as part of a three-day visit to Russia.

The Foreign Ministry's official spokesman also said Wednesday Russian arms deliveries to Venezuela fully corresponded to the norms of international and Russian law.

Russia has supplied Venezuela with Kalashnikov assault rifles in addition to the billion-dollar combat aircraft deal.

Mikhail Kamynin said, "Military-technical cooperation with Venezuela, as well as with other countries, is carried out by Russia in full accordance with the norms of international law as well as Russian legislation."

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