

Venezuela considers selling F-16s to Iran

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CARACAS - (AP) -- Venezuela's military is considering selling its fleet of U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets to another country, possibly Iran, in response to a U.S. ban on arms sales to President Hugo Chávez's government, a Venezuelan military official said Tuesday.

Gen. Alberto Muller, a senior advisor to Chávez, said he had recommended to the defense minister that Venezuela consider selling the 21 jets to another country. Muller said he thought it was worthwhile to consider "the feasibility of a negotiation with Iran for the sale of those planes."

The Iranian Embassy in Caracas, however, said no such deal has been formally proposed.

"We don't have plans to buy planes," said Hojjatollah Soltani, second secretary at the Iranian diplomatic mission.

The U.S. State Department warned that Washington would have to sign off on any sale of the F-16s -- a possibility that spokesman Sean McCormack suggested was highly unlikely.

"Without the written consent of the United States, you can't transfer these defense articles, and in this case F-16s, to a third country," McCormack said in Washington.

Even before the United States announced the ban on arms sales Monday, Washington had stopped selling Venezuela sensitive upgrades for the F-16s.