

Venezuela Leading the Race For the UN Security Council Seat

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In October, elections will take place for five non-permanent UN Security Council seats to be held in 2007. One of them will be for the Latin American seat now held by Argentina. The two leading regional contenders vying to fill the opening are Venezuela and Guatemala, and the other countries in the region comprising Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) will vote on which one gets it. If they're unable to reach a consensus, which may happen, the choice will be up to the General Assembly where it will take a two-thirds majority secret ballot vote process to select the winner.

It's not hard to know which country the US supports and why it's doing all it can to subvert the chances of the other one. Guatemala has been a close US ally ever since the CIA fomented a coup in 1954 to oust the country's democratically elected leader Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Ever since, the country has been run by a succession of oppressive military and civilian governments that turned Guatemala into pariah state compiling the hemisphere's worst human rights record that never ended even after the 1996 UN brokered Peace Accords that officially ended a brutal 36 year civil conflict waged mainly against the country's indigenous Mayan majority that resulted in the state-sponsored murder of 200,000 or more of its people.

Throughout the last half century, the US treated Guatemala as a valued ally and ignored its atrocious human rights record that Amnesty International continues to document. The human rights organization finds that although Guatemala today is nominally a democratic republic, it's abuses against its own people continue unabated and its electoral process leaves much to be desired. It led Amnesty to call Guatemala a "land of injustice." But that's not an issue for the Bush administration that's exerted its typical strong-arm bullying tactics to line up votes for its preferred candidate it knows will back all US proposals in the Council. That's sure not to happen if Venezuela under democratically elected President Hugo Chavez wins the seat, which is why Washington is pulling out all the stops to prevent it. Chavez is committed to building an alternative to the neoliberal Washington consensus and is undeterred by the power and threats against him by his dominant northern neighbor that wants Venezuela marginalized in the region and President Chavez ousted and replaced by someone willing to serve the interests of capital. Chavez won't and Washington knows it.

Venezuela On Track to Win Based On Chavez's Opposition to US Dominance

At this stage in the campaign, Venezuela looks on track to win the Council seat although it's likely to be a close vote. In lobbying for support, Venezuela has built its campaign on the need to counter the Global North's one-sided brave new world order agenda and especially to neutralize Washington's dominance and misuse of power in the region and wanting to

continue exploiting it for its own imperial gain. Venezuela's Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic to the UN put it in terms of hoping to "be an element of balance against hegemonic trends, in favor of the interests of countries from the South with an independent position." The country's former Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez Araque put it in terms that: "This has become an issue of national dignity, because a superpower launched a campaign and exerts pressure on foreign countries." And Vice-Foreign Minister for North America Mari Pili Hernandez added that his country deserves the seat because it "respects the sovereignty of all nations (and) has demonstrated that it is an independent country that does not accept pressure from any (other) state."

Hugo Chavez personally has been vigorously working to build a coalition of support to win the Council seat and took his anti-imperialism campaign abroad in July to do it visiting Iran, Russia, Belarus, Mali, Benin, Qatar and Vietnam. His efforts have paid off in many parts of the world including in the US dominated Middle East where Caracas recently earned observer status in the Cairo-based Arab League. The organization's Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs Ahmed Benhelli soon plans to visit Venezuela and said he would make "an effort to gain common support from all countries of my region so that Venezuela can join the UN Security Council." Chavez also sought support within the African Union at its July Summit in Banjul. At it he proposed a program of cooperation between Africa and Latin America based on the creation of four initiatives aimed at closer economic ties between the two regions. Part of it involves an oil-trade agreement known as PetroSouth. The effort may be working as Ghana, Zimbabwe and Mali have since indicated they will support Venezuela's bid for the Security Council seat.

Chavez has also been active in Latin American using his new leverage as a formal member of the Southern Common Market Mercosur trade bloc that also includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay with Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as associate members. A close eye is now on thus far undecided countries like Chili and several others in the region to see if they can withstand Washington's intimidation to support Venezuela as the candidate most deserving of serving on the Council. Other countries in the region have already shown they're willing to do it and have announced they will vote for Venezuela in October. Those countries include the four other Mercosur members as well as Bolivia, Cuba and the Caribbean Community 15 country trade bloc known as CARICOM. Opposed to Venezuela largely because of US pressure are Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. On the fence and being watched is Haiti under its new president Rene Preval who in his first term as the country's President in the 1990s governed progressively meaning he should support his putative ally Hugo Chavez. But US pressure is intense against him, and he's well aware of what happened to former Haitian president and ally Jean-Bertrand Aristide who was ousted from office by a US-instigated coup against him in February, 2004 only because he governed independently of Washington's authority. It remains to be seen if Preval is courageous enough to support Chavez or will succumb to the threat of becoming a victim of the same fate. We'll soon know.

US Strong-Arm Bullying To Defeat the Venezuelan Bid

The US anti-Venezuelan campaign's main thesis is that the Chavez government's presence as a Council member would be "disruptive (and) non-consensus-seeking," meaning, of course, that any vote against a US position is one to be avoided so the de facto ruler of the world will always get its way. One example of this is Caracas' refusal to support the

International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) US pressured resolution to have the Security Council vote and act against Iran's perfectly legal commercial nuclear program. The only reason the Bush administration opposes it is the same reason it opposes the Chavez government. Both countries act independently of US authority which is anathema to the ruling hegemon that wants total control and no effective opposition. It wields a heavy hand against any challenge to its authority and uses all means to do it including preemptive war.

Washington Engendered Opposition

Once again the usual heavy-handed Washington pressure may be backfiring as it's already convinced some Latin American and other nations to buck US authority and support Venezuela for the Council seat. Washington tried before in 2005 to isolate Venezuela in the Organization of American States (OAS) by backing a supposed process of democratic rule in the region allowing member states the right to intervene against any nation that violates the OAS charter. The plan was a thinly veiled scheme aimed at Venezuela that the member states saw through and rejected. It showed that when Washington goes too far, as it's now doing, other nations on the receiving end of its bullying may coalesce against it successfully.

That's what happened in 2001 when the US was humiliated and denied a seat on the UN Human Rights Commission it was a founding member of and was replaced on it by Syria. It happened again in 2003 at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha round trade talks in Cancun and once more in July, 2006 in Geneva after the resumption of these talks collapsed because enough participating nations in them refused any longer to put up with the usual US negotiating practice of demanding all take and offering little give in return. Right now that's how it seems to be going in the race for the UN Security Council seat. Venezuela looks to be on track to win it and likely will as long as President Hugo Chavez makes no serious tactical error between now and the October vote. So far in his campaigning efforts Chavez has performed admirably, and if he continues to he may be on his way to dealing the US still another stinging and humiliating defeat to go along with all the others the US has been sustaining (politically and militarily) proving even the de facto ruler of the world is vulnerable when enough other nations (or a determined "resistance") refuse to submit and are willing to take it on.

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