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Brazil Elected to Two-Year Term on U.N. Security Council

by LADB Staff

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The controversy over a possible permanent UN Security Council seat for Latin America was a recurring point of discussion during US President Bill Clinton's recent trip to Latin America. Brazil has been vying for the spot, while Argentina has favored the rotation of the seat among Latin American countries. With Brazil's recent election to the Council for two years, it will be in a good position to lobby for a permanent spot.

The Security Council currently consists of five permanent members with veto power the US, Russia, Britain, China, and France and 10 nonpermanent members elected for two-year terms. Expansion of the Council is among a number of reforms on the agenda for this year's General Assembly. Despite several years of discussion, however, no agreement has been reached on how many new members should be added to the Council, how many should be given permanent seats, and whether new permanent members should also have veto power.

Many countries, including the US, favor making Germany and Japan permanent Council members because of their economic standing, their contributions to the UN budget, and their growing role in UN peacekeeping efforts. Significant, but not universal, agreement exists that the developing areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America should each have a Security Council seat. Options for how the seats are allotted include providing a permanent seat for one country from each region or rotating the seats among several countries in each region.

Supporters of expanding the number of permanent seats want a resolution passed this year that would determine the number of seats to be added but not who would fill them or whether new members would have veto rights. UN critics among the Republican-controlled US Congress have said they would block ratification of any agreement that expanded the veto, particularly to developing nations.

Disagreements emerge in region about permanent council seat

The Security Council seat has become a thorny issue among Latin American countries. The friction between Argentina and Brazil first erupted in September when Argentine President Carlos Saul Menem said a permanent Security Council seat for Brazil would have a "destabilizing" effect on the region (see NotiSur, 08/29/97).

US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson, speaking in Bariloche, Argentina, at the end of the Clinton trip, said he is "detecting greater support for the rotating system." Richardson said the Clinton administration feels strongly that Latin America "must be a permanent member of the Security Council," but that it is "up to the countries of the region to decide how they want to share the seat." At the UN General Assembly in New York in September, the differences between Brazil and Argentina became more public through speeches to the Assembly by the region's presidents and foreign ministers, as well as in frequent bilateral meetings to lobby for particular positions.

Brazil, the first country to speak to the Assembly, made its pitch for a permanent Council seat, saying it was "willing to accept the responsibilities of permanent membership if called upon by the international community to do so."

Foreign Minister Luiz Felipe Lampreia said Brazil repudiated "all discrimination in the conception or assignment of new seats," a reference to veto rights for new members. "We must not create a third or fourth category of members," which would weaken the participation of the developing world. During his address, however, Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella said any new Security Council seats allocated to Latin American and Caribbean countries should be rotated among nations of the region to prevent any country from controlling a permanent seat. "

Argentina holds the position that an open-ended mechanism of rotation needs to be established that will enable the participation of all those states that have shown their commitment to, and respect for, the [UN] Charter," Di Tella said. "This mechanism will avoid discrimination against those states that, like Argentina, bear greater financial responsibilities." Among the other Latin American countries, Mexico strongly opposed Brazil permanently representing Latin America on the Council.

Mexican Foreign Minister Jose Angel Gurria not only made it clear in his speech to the General Assembly that Mexico prefers the seat be rotative, but he also warned that the issue had resurfaced dangerous "ambitions" and "hegemonies" in the region. Gurria said Mexico would prefer that expansion of the Council not be taken up at the present time, concentrating instead on other UN reforms proposed by Secretary General Kofi Annan. Chile, however, backed Brazil's bid and was totally opposed to a rotating seat. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Insulza said a rotating seat "would be absurd, it would not make any sense." He added, "If there is no agreement, and if the countries do not want to discuss the matter, well fine, we won't discuss it."

Uruguay, Nicaragua vie for General Assembly presidency

On Oct. 14, the General Assembly voted to seat Brazil, Bahrain, Gabon, Gambia, and Slovenia on the Security Council for the next two years, beginning on Jan. 1, 1998. The two-year term will give Brazil an opportunity to lobby for the permanent position. Should the Council be expanded, Brazil, India, and South Africa are the leading candidates to represent the developing countries. Meanwhile, observers at the UN see the makings of another Latin American diplomatic dispute regarding the election for the General Assembly presidency. With the election of the next General Assembly president more than a year away, Uruguay has proposed its foreign minister, Alvaro Ramos, for the post.

At the same time, Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman has surprisingly nominated his predecessor, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. "It's incredible that things have heated up so far in advance," said a member of Brazil's staff at the UN. "We see it as a lack of tact by the Nicaraguans." The General Assembly presidency rotates on a yearly basis among the five regional groups, and the term that begins in September 1998 will fall to the Latin American and Caribbean group. For almost two years, Uruguay has made known its intention to nominate Ramos. The Foreign Ministry in Montevideo said Uruguay has the support of 24 of the 34 countries that make up the group, although it is very early to predict what will happen. [Sources: El Nuevo Herald, 09/23/97; Clarin (Argentina), 09/23/97, 09/24/97; Agence France-Presse, The Buenos Aires Herald (Argentina), 09/29/97; Inter Press

Service, 10/14/97; Spanish news service EFE, 10/18/97; Reuter, 09/05/97, 09/22/97, 09/23/97, 09/24/97,
10/14/97, 10/20/97; Notimex, 10/20/97, 10/22/97]

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