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Andrés Gaudán

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by Andrés Gaudín
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Supported by Latin America nations and the Group of 77 and China—the same countries that on Sept. 9 pushed for the UN General Assembly to approve Argentina’s proposal to create a multilateral legal framework for sovereign debt restructuring (NotiSur, Oct. 3, 2014)—Venezuela was selected on Oct. 16 to be one of the 10 rotating members of the UN Security Council for a two-year period.

Minutes before the vote, Bolivia’s Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca briefly synthesized the importance of the pending decision. "We are one step away from adopting a historic resolution," he said. "Venezuela, like Cuba, is one of the countries reviled by the major powers, and its designation to the council will mean unprecedented political support for Venezuela’s democratic government."

The major powers Choquehuanca referred to are the five permanent members of the Security Council, which hold veto power at the UN: the US, Great Britain, France, Russia, and China. As a representative of the Latin American bloc, Venezuela will fill the place Argentina held during the past two years. The election was decided by 181 of the 192 countries present, with one invalid ballot and 10 countries abstaining. It has been years since a decision like this one has been settled in the first round of voting by an overwhelming majority.

Caracas officials, recalling that their country’s entry to the council was blocked eight years ago when the US pushed for Guatemala as an alternative candidate, considered this election a major political victory (NotiCen, Oct. 26, 2006, and Nov. 9, 2006). At that time, Panama won the Latin American slot on the Security Council over both Venezuela and Guatemala.

Venezuela sees vote as political victory

"This is a historic triumph; it is a matter of pride for Venezuelans because nearly everyone supported our country with their vote," President Nicolás Maduro said.

In New York, Venezuela’s Ambassador to the UN Samuel Moncada said, "With this support, Latin America and all its friends around the world have defeated an infamous campaign attempting to portray us as the worst violators of human rights." He added proudly, "Now we have a unique international position: we hold the triple crown: we are on the Security Council, on the UN’s Human Rights Council, and, in 2015, we will assume the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement."

At the other end of the spectrum, US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power expressed displeasure with the result, warning that "the conduct" of the Caracas government at the UN "has run counter to the spirit of the UN Charter and its violations of human rights at home are at odds with the Charter’s letter."

A month earlier, on Sept. 15, the Diario de la Américas reported that Marie Harf, US State Department spokesperson, had implied that the countries supporting Venezuela’s candidacy were
irresponsible. The Miami-based Spanish-language newspaper reported that Harf said regional
groups of the UN member states have the responsibility to present candidates that support the UN’s
principles, that contribute to the Security Council’s role in maintaining peace and international
security, and that defend human rights.

Meanwhile, the Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) news agency reported that Roberta Jacobson,
assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, declined to comment on the news
about Venezuela, although, the agency added that, without specifically mentioning the country,
Jacobson reportedly said Security Council members "should implement and live by the principles,
the commitments, the treaties, the rules and regulations … of the United Nations, the international
agreements and its underlying principles."

Using outdated Cold War rhetoric, Cuban-born US Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) was blunt and
avoided all euphemisms. "Rogue regimes like Cuba and Iran will now have a reliable partner on
the Council to advance their own political agendas and to weaken US diplomatic efforts," she said,
adding that "China and Russia will have another ally to help stymie any serious attempts at working
to resolve the world’s most pressing threats."

On Oct. 9, six senators—Republicans Marco Rubio (R-FL), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and John McCain (R-
AZ), and Democrats Dick Durbin (D-IL), Bill Nelson (D-FL), and Bob Menéndez (D-NJ)—made a
last ditch attempt to support the White House in blocking Venezuela’s election. In a letter sent to
Secretary of State John Kerry, the legislators urged him "to lead a diplomatic effort at the United
Nations to deny Venezuela a seat on the UN Security Council."

Because voting is secret with delegates dropping their vote in an urn, it is not known who cast an
invalid vote—although most suspect it was the US—and who abstained.

On Sept. 9, Argentina’s proposal to create a judicial framework to regulate sovereign debt was
successful, with 124 countries supporting the proposal. The US led the opposition by 11 countries
including Canada, Israel, and some allies in Europe and Oceania.

**Venezuela solidly backed by region**

On Sept. 11, the Associated Press (AP) broke the story that Latin American countries had decided
to present Venezuela as a regional candidate for the Security Council. On the same day that
people in the US commemorated the anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attack on New York’s World
Trade Center and the Pentagon and Latin Americans remembered the bloody end of the Chilean
democratic government headed by President Salvador Allende (1970-1973), journalist Joshua
Goodman revealed that Latin American countries had decided on July 23 to support Venezuela,
and the Group of 77 and China followed suit. The AP writer reported that the US had blocked
Venezuela’s election in 2006 but noted that today many more countries agree with Venezuela’s anti-
US stance.

"The action reflects a decade-long shift in the region away from the United States. Conservative
leaders from Peru to El Salvador that in 2006 had no fear of picking a fight with [Venezuelan
President Hugo] Chávez have since been voted out of office. Even nations that differ with
Venezuela’s policies, such as Chile and Colombia, want to avoid a confrontation that harkens back
to the polarized politics of the Cold War when meddling by Washington was frequent," the AP
report said.
Near the end of his article, Goodman wrote, "Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research, said Washington’s ability to shape the voting is minimal compared to 2006. While Venezuela’s preference for heated rhetoric may stand out, Maduro’s concern for national sovereignty is in step with other regional leaders, he said, so having Venezuela on the Security Council could serve as a counterweight to the US when debating the use of force."

Weisbrot told the AP, "Venezuela isn’t subject to pressure from the US and its allies and today, when the US is the most war-making country in the world, that’s very important."

Following the vote in the General Assembly, a columnist writing in the Uruguayan newspaper La República emphasized that just occupying a seat on the Security Council "gives the ability to influence major international issues, provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships with other members, and facilitates access to valuable information."

**US, Venezuela relations strained at best**


Nevertheless, both governments periodically show signs of rapprochement that invariably break down with a return to renewed hard-line positions (NotiSur, Aug. 14, 2009). These past months have been no exception. On Sept. 17, Caracas deported three US citizens and required Washington to oversee their sentences in US prisons. One was sentenced to 12 years for growing marijuana; a second was sentenced to 10 years for cocaine possession; and a third was sentenced to 25 years for sexual abuse of children and adolescents.

Interestingly, this gesture came after the US denied visas to 24 Venezuelan officials accused of "excessive use of force during the crackdown on anti-government demonstrations."

Both parties followed with more accusations. Washington denounced glitches in the Venezuelan justice system. Although Caracas protested a "sustained attitude of aggression" and "empire interference" in its domestic affairs, the Maduro government simultaneously reaffirmed its "willingness to work for peace and coexistence between peoples based on the principles of mutual respect, independence, and sovereignty."

At any moment, Washington and Caracas are likely to engage in a new round of rapprochement followed by hard-line distancing.

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