

# China backs Chávez for U.N. bid

**After winning Russia's support last month, Hugo Chávez said that China also now supports Venezuela's bid for a seat on the U.N. Security Council.**

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**BEIJING** - Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said Thursday that China has thrown its support behind his nation's bid for a seat on the U.N. Security Council as the two countries signed deals to develop Venezuela's vast oil resources.

Chinese President Hu Jintao warmly welcomed Chávez, who has proposed an ambitious plan for his country -- the world's No. 5 oil exporter -- to almost quadruple sales to fuel-hungry China to one million barrels per day in the next decade.

"I believe that, through your visit, the two countries' cooperation in all aspects can be promoted," Hu told Chávez at the Great Hall of the People, the seat of China's parliament.

Chávez responded by saying that "mutual trust between our two countries has been deepening, and the economic and cultural exchanges have been strengthening."

The two countries' alliance has expanded beyond energy, however. Chávez told reporters after his meeting with Hu that the Chinese president had expressed support for Venezuela's bid to join the Security Council -- a move the United States has sought to block.

"The support of China is very important from the political and moral point of view," said Chávez, who has fostered increasingly close ties with North Korea and Iran despite international tension over their suspected nuclear ambitions.

The U.S. government, which frequently clashes with leftist Chávez, is backing Guatemala for the Security Council seat instead. The race between the two countries is to be decided by the General Assembly in a secret ballot in October.

China is the second of the council's five permanent, veto-wielding members to back Venezuela. Chávez won Russia's support last month.

The Asian nation has sought to lessen its dependency on Middle Eastern oil while securing access to the resources needed to fuel its booming industrial expansion, an aim that dovetails with Chávez's goal of selling more oil to other countries besides the U.S., its biggest customer.

Energy agreements signed by Hu and Chávez include one for their main government oil companies -- China National Petroleum Corp. and Petróleos de Venezuela SA -- to jointly develop Block 4 of the Junin area in Venezuela's Orinoco oil belt. China has been helping to certify reserves in the 247-square mile block, which are estimated at some 20 billion barrels of oil.

Another deal calls for the two companies to jointly explore an oil field in Venezuela's Zumano region.

The U.S. government would "be concerned because this deal makes both countries stronger," said Steven Knell, a London-based energy analyst for Global Insight, a private forecasting firm.

"Despite assurances, these countries represent a challenge to America," Knell said. "It's not exactly the sort of bilateral relationship they would want to see going much deeper."

Chávez told reporters on Thursday that he hoped to be exporting 500,000 barrels of oil per day to China by 2009.

"And in the next decade we will aim for a million barrels," he said.