

Iran Who? Venezuela Takes the Lead in a Battle of Anti-U.S. Sound Bites

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Jason Szenes/European Pressphoto Agency

President Hugo Chávez drew gasps from the United Nations General Assembly Wednesday when he compared President Bush to the devil.

[UNITED NATIONS](#), Sept. 20 — In the end, President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) of [Iran](#) lost the much-hyped war of words waged against President Bush at the [General Assembly](#). A stealth opponent swooped in and took the prize.

Speaking on Wednesday from the same lectern Mr. Bush had occupied the day before, President [Hugo Chávez](#) of [Venezuela](#) announced, to gasps and even giggles: “The devil came here yesterday, right here.

“It smells of sulfur still today, this table that I am now standing in front of,” he said.

Just hours before, Mr. Ahmadinejad took issue with the great Satan, too. But what a difference. Where Mr. Chávez was Khrushchevian, waving around books and stopping just short of shoe-banging, Mr. Ahmadinejad was flowery, almost Socratic in his description of behavior that only the devil would condone.

“By causing war and conflict, some are fast expanding their domination, accumulating greater wealth, while others endure poverty,” Mr. Ahmadinejad lectured. “Some seek to rule the world relying on weapons and threats while others live in poverty. Some occupy the homelands of others, interfering in their affairs and controlling their oil and resources, while others are bombarded daily in their own homes, their children murdered in the streets.”

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who has been known for inflammatory language in his sound bites at home, suggesting that Israel should be wiped off the map and denying

the Holocaust, was much less direct in his United Nations speech, asking question after question.

An example: “The question needs to be asked: if the governments of the United States or the United Kingdom, who are permanent members of the Security Council, commit aggression, occupation and violation of international law, which of the organs of the U.N. can take them to account? Can a Council in which they are privileged members address their violations? Has this ever happened?”

Mr. Ahmadinejad’s speech received all the buildup beforehand, particularly since he was scheduled on Tuesday, the same day as Mr. Bush. At the end of his speech, Mr. Ahmadinejad, as Mr. Bush did before him, received polite, diplomatic-style applause from the assembled officials, junior note-takers and various United Nations bureaucrats.

And for Mr. Chávez?

The gasps. The horrified giggles. The loud applause that lasted so long that the organization’s officials had to tell the cheering group to cut it out.

President Bush’s defenders noted that at least the United States had let Mr. Chávez and Mr. Ahmadinejad come here and say whatever they pleased without being thrown in jail. [John R. Bolton](#), the American ambassador to the United Nations, who said that someone at the “junior note-taker” level was chronicling Mr. Chávez’s speech for the United States, offered: “You know, it’s a phenomenon of the United States that not only can he say those things in the General Assembly, he could walk over to Central Park and exercise freedom of speech in Central Park, too, and say pretty much whatever he wanted. Too bad President Chávez doesn’t extend the same freedom of speech to the people of Venezuela.”

For her part, Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) said Mr. Chávez’s comments were “not becoming of a head of state.”

But compared with Mr. Ahmadinejad, Mr. Chávez was just more colorful. He brandished a copy of Noam Chomsky’s “Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance” and recommended it to members of the General Assembly to read. Later, he told a news conference that one of his greatest

regrets was not getting to meet Mr. Chomsky before he died. (Mr. Chomsky, 77, is still alive.)

At that same news conference, just after his speech, he made eyes at a pretty Colombian journalist who asked him why he went around calling President Bush names. “Are you Colombian?” Mr. Chávez asked, performing a quick merengue move with his upper body and flashing her a grin.

He suggested that Americans read Mr. Chomsky’s book instead of spending all their time “watching Superman and Batman” movies.

Minutes later, at the same news conference, Mr. Chávez offered to double the amount of heating oil Venezuela donates to poor communities in the United States. He reminded reporters that Citgo, which is owned by Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., delivered free and discounted oil to Indian tribal reservations and low-income neighborhoods in the United States, including the Bronx.

“We are ready to double our oil donations,” Mr. Chávez said. “That is a Christian gesture.”

Mr. Ahmadinejad did not offer any Iranian oil to poor United States neighborhoods.