

Keep Security Council safe from demagogues

OUR OPINION: SEAT SHOULD GO TO GUATEMALA, NOT VENEZUELA

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President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela makes no bones about why he wants his country to win a seat on the U.N. Security Council. A successful bid will put him in a better position to pursue the anti-American crusade that has taken him on globe-trotting missions to Tehran, Moscow and Beijing over the years. He even went to Baghdad when Saddam Hussein was still in power. If Mr. Chávez wants to pose as a Third World David fighting the U.S. Goliath, that's up to him, but there's no reason for others to encourage this dangerous delusion.

Chávez's policy goal

From all we know and have seen of Mr. Chávez over the years, he would use the seat on the Security Council first and foremost to obstruct the agenda of the United States and its allies. Taking exception to U.S. positions on diplomatic issues small and large should not disqualify any nation from having a vote in the Security Council, but Mr. Chávez would make this a policy goal.

Recall that in 2003, despite exceptional pressure from the Bush administration, both Mexico and Chile voted against a U.S.-backed resolution on Iraq, and they remain among our strongest allies in the Western Hemisphere. But for Venezuela -- unlike every other country in the Western Hemisphere, always excepting Cuba -- obstructing U.S. diplomacy whenever and wherever Mr. Chávez can is a principle of foreign policy -- an end in itself.

Mr. Chávez loses no opportunity to condemn U.S. policies in the region and around the world. And when he can't find any real targets for his complaints, he makes something up. His latest absurd claim is that there is a U.S. plan under way to topple Bolivian President Evo Morales. Mr. Chávez offers absolutely no evidence to back this up, but if you say it loud enough and often enough, someone is bound to believe it.

Mr. Chávez didn't exactly burnish his credentials as a statesman in his recent appearance at the U.N. General Assembly when he used the occasion to call President Bush the "devil." This brought him some scattered applause and laughter, but acting like a demagogue shouldn't win him any votes in the Security Council race. A victory for Venezuela would be an embarrassment for the nations of the Western Hemisphere and for the United Nations as a whole.

A founding member

Venezuela has been able to mount a popularity campaign by selling oil to its neighbors at bargain prices. That's one reason it has the support of the vote-rich Caribbean Community for the U.N. seat. But Guatemala, the U.S.-backed candidate, is a founding member of the United Nations that has never served on the Security Council. It may be smaller and poorer than Venezuela, but it is more deserving of this seat on the most influential arm of the United Nations.