

Venezuela Is Denied Security Council Seat

New Vote Scheduled Today as Intensive Campaign Fails to Win Two-Thirds of Ballots
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UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 16 -- [Venezuela](#) was stymied Monday in its bid to win a seat on the U.N. Security Council, a result that shocked diplomats who had expected President Hugo Chavez's leftist, oil-rich government to gain a platform on the international stage.

Guatemala finished ahead of Venezuela in nine of the first 10 rounds of secret voting held by the U.N. General Assembly. But neither secured the required two-thirds vote to succeed Argentina on Jan. 1 in the open Latin American seat on the 15-nation council.

Voting will resume Tuesday.

Delegates at the United Nations had predicted that Venezuela would easily receive enough support for the seat, but the opening ballot showed Guatemala ahead 114 to 74. Venezuela gained votes through the day but never did better than a 93 to 93 tie with Guatemala. Afterward, several envoys expressed surprise that Venezuela had fared so poorly.

The result came as a relief to the United States, which had lobbied actively on behalf of Guatemala. Chavez's government, U.S. officials warned, would play a destructive role on the council, lending its support to those countries, including [Iran](#), Sudan and [North Korea](#), that have defied the United Nations.

It also represented a personal blow to Chavez, who had run a costly political campaign that involved millions of dollars in aid to poor countries as well as state visits to [Russia](#), [China](#) and the Middle East.

Chavez may have undercut his country's chances with a provocative speech last month before the General Assembly, in which he described President Bush as "the devil." And once-solid support for Venezuela in South America, from countries including Chile and Paraguay, wavered after Chavez's government entered into a military pact with [Bolivia](#), which has lost territory to both those countries.

The United States, [Britain](#), China, Russia and [France](#) enjoy permanent membership on the 15-member Security Council. The other 10 seats are distributed regionally for two-year terms; a vote by the General Assembly fills five seats each year. [South Africa](#), Indonesia, Italy and Belgium were easily elected Monday for their regions.

But the deadlock over the Latin American seat raised the prospect of a long election and that a compromise candidate -- possibly Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay or Chile -- might enter the race. [Mexico](#) and [Cuba](#) received single votes on some ballots Monday.

Chavez has been hostile to Washington for years, but he has been particularly antagonistic since the White House offered tacit support for a 2002 coup that briefly removed him from power. Venezuela's U.N. ambassador, Francisco Javier Arias

Cardenas, characterized the race as a challenge between a fearless champion of the developing world and the world's lone superpower.

"We are not competing with a brother country. We are competing with the biggest power on the planet," he said.

Some delegates said Chavez's Sept. 20 speech alienated moderate members who felt he had violated U.N. protocol.

For those who view the General Assembly chamber as "a very sacrosanct place," Chavez's performance exhibited "bad taste," said Tanzania's ambassador, Augustine P. Mahiga. "It can be a platform for the battle of ideas but not for the vilification of one country."

Mahiga said, however, that Washington's intensive promotion of Guatemala's bid may have helped its cause in some capitals and "swayed" others to vote against it.

"It's a double-edged sword," he said. The race was "perceived as a contest between the United States and Venezuela."

Alberto Garrido, an author and analyst in Caracas who has written several books on Chavez, said the vote is a serious setback for Chavez's campaign to project Venezuelan influence beyond Latin America.

Venezuela has bought foreign debt from Argentina, sold crude oil at cut-rate prices to smaller Caribbean islands and provided aid to Africa -- all efforts designed, in part, to counter U.S. influence.

"This is a big setback in Chavez's strategy," said Garrido, whose latest book, "Chavez's Wars," deals with the president's conflicts with the Bush administration and other foes. "He had a plan to become the institutionalized voice of the south, if he had gotten that seat. This is a blow, perhaps the biggest blow in his geopolitical strategy."

In Venezuela, the government's failure to secure a seat was called "an embarrassing defeat" by Manuel Rosales, who is running against Chavez in December's presidential election. The president retains the support of a majority of Venezuelans, recent polls have shown, but opponents accuse him of ignoring spiraling crime, chronic unemployment and poverty while he focuses on making a name for himself abroad.

Chavez has spent much of his presidency outside Venezuela. But since July, as the Security Council campaign has built, his travel schedule has become feverish, with trips to Russia, China, Vietnam, Iran and Belarus.

The Venezuelan government's argument that it would be a voice for those countries suffering at the hands of U.S. imperialism did not strike a chord with enough nations, said Milos Alcalay, a former Venezuelan ambassador to the United Nations.

"To argue that Venezuela would go to the Security Council to be the counterweight against imperialism didn't mesh with the philosophy that this is a body that aims to find

things in common," said Alcalay, who resigned his post because of opposition to Chavez's policies.

"This was firstly a rejection of combative language, but it was also a rejection of Venezuela's claim to be the voice of those who do not have a voice, of Africa, the nonaligned," he said. "And really, they do have a voice. Africa elected South Africa as its spokesman."