

VENEZUELA - Venezuela's UN Ambassador Accuses Bush Administration of Blackmailing Other Countries Over Contested UN Seat

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Friday, October 20th, 2006 - [Democracy Now! News Program](#) - On Thursday the Bush administration urged Venezuela to give up its campaign to win a seat on the United Nations Security Council. Over the past four days, the UN General Assembly has conducted 30 rounds of votes to decide whether Venezuela or Guatemala should represent Latin America on the Security Council. Guatemala has won every round of voting but has failed to secure the needed two-thirds majority.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has said he would use the seat to be "the voice of the South" and to challenge American hegemony. [...]

Francisco Arias Cardenas, Venezuela's Ambassador to the U.N. [...] joins me now in the studio. Luisa Golindano will help us with translation... Welcome to Democracy Now.

AMY GOODMAN: Prior to the voting, President Chavez accused the White House of waging a dirty war against his candidacy:

PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ: [translated] I have said that it is not going to be easy, because the empire [the United States] is moving all of its pieces in pressuring and trying to blackmail half the world to try to impede us from becoming a nonpermanent member of the Security Council.

AMY GOODMAN: On Thursday, John Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations urged Venezuela to drop out of the race:

JOHN BOLTON: I think the will of the General Assembly is quite clear. Guatemala has been up by about 30 votes consistently. They're very close to a two-thirds majority, and the honorable thing here would be for the candidate that's now lost 28 out of 29 votes to withdraw. But if Venezuela insists on putting everybody through all this, vote after vote after vote, we'll be here, and we'll continue to support Guatemala.

AMY GOODMAN: Voting is expected to resume, but Guatemala called for a longer extension. This is Guatemala's foreign minister Gert Rosenthal:

GERT ROSENTHAL: We would like there to be a longer recess so that we can talk among each other, among ourselves and between ourselves to see if we find a way out. We are not happy with tying up the work of the General Assembly, but for the time being, since we are in the lead, we have no intention of stepping down.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Guatemala's ambassador. Ambassador Francisco Arias Cardenas is Venezuela's ambassador to the UN. He joins us now in our firehouse studio. Luisa Golindano will help with translation. We welcome you to Democracy Now! Thank you very much.

AMY GOODMAN: John Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, says Venezuela should withdraw the nomination to have the Latin American seat on the UN Security Council. What is your response?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] Ambassador Bolton is not the person that has to decide on this issue. The General Assembly is the proper body to make any decision with this regard.

AMY GOODMAN: What is happening this week? How are you waging your campaign to take the seat on the UN Security Council?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] What we are doing are the special point in our campaign. We are trying to go far beyond the simple fact of just winning a seat. We are trying to — more transcendent issues. What we are trying to do is just trying to avoid the previous veto of Ambassador Bolton, for a legitimate right of a member state to be elected as a nonpermanent member on the Security Council. Basically, blackmail or any other pressure won't have any effect. What he has seen on this campaign is that Ambassador Bolton and his allies have been trying to avoid the election of a sovereign state.

AMY GOODMAN: You have accused John Bolton, the United States, of interfering with this selection process. What has the U.S. done?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] They have made several attempts to oppose the Venezuelan candidature to the Security Council, certainly.

AMY GOODMAN: What?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We indeed have faced several threatens and several pressures — I mean, no threat, and pressures — from several officers from the United States government, Condoleezza Rice, who have put a lot of pressure, especially on small countries.

AMY GOODMAN: What kind of pressure?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We have seen several displays on their campaign. Basically they remain at the [inaudible] hall, calling people, making phone calls, and business several countries, and putting a lot of pressure on small countries, and they have asked for — to keep this secret, because they are weak countries.

AMY GOODMAN: President Chavez in Venezuela accused Washington of waging a dirty war in this last ditch effort to make Guatemala, not Venezuela — give it the seat on the Security Council. He said the delegates of the U.S. are running around the halls of the United Nations headquarters. If, Arias, if you try to talk to an ambassador, as soon as he is done, five U.S. representatives immediately surround him or her. Is this the case?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We have unmasked their attempts to put pressure over several countries. But this election, our feeling is, we are convinced that this election goes far beyond the contest between two countries.

AMY GOODMAN: What goes beyond? Why is this more important than these two countries?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] If we accept the pressures and if we accept what they're trying to do, he said that it's far beyond the election between two countries, because it has to do with a reform of the United Nations, which is an important issue. If we accept their pressure, it will go against the democratization, what is quite necessary within the United Nations. Up to now we have resisted all of the pressure, and we think that it is quite necessary that an independent country with an independent voice will contribute to achieve the necessary reform of the Security Council.

AMY GOODMAN: The Associated Press is reporting, as Venezuela lobbies for a UN Security Council seat, President Chavez has bolstered his chances by spreading petrodollars across the Americas and beyond, extending an airstrip on a Caribbean island, sending emergency food aid to Africa, fixing a rundown hospital in Uruguay.

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] Before the campaign for winning a seat on the Security Council, one of the main policies in our country had been south [inaudible] cooperation. And President Chavez several times has insisted that we have to share the bread, or we have to cooperate with our [inaudible] countries. Our campaign is basically based on cooperation, as he said, and is based on trying to convince the people that we are an independent voice, an independent option. We are not, by any means, using petrodollars in this campaign.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to ask you about the international reaction to President Chavez's comments in front of the UN General Assembly last month, when he called President Bush the devil and said he still smelled the sulfur burning as he stood there speaking. Well, I sat down with Bolivian President Evo Morales the day after the speech and asked President Morales of Bolivia what he felt about Chavez's comments.

PRESIDENT EVO MORALES: [translated] I'm not interested in commenting about these words between two presidents. But I'm convinced that people who represent a family, they can be professionals or not, they can be presidents or not. They all have dignity. One thing is to question someone's policies. We can have differences. But to attack someone's image or a direct offense, I don't think I share that.

AMY GOODMAN: That is President Morales of Bolivia. Ambassador, your response.

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] What President Chavez did, he just used a strong metaphor, but it could be misinterpreted. He didn't mean to be offensive. What President Chavez did was just unmask his statement. President Bush came to the general debate with a discourse trying to be like God, and he was advising Iraq and Iran and several countries, since what they have done at the Security Council was just obstruct the resolutions on the invasion to Lebanon and veto on other resolutions.

AMY GOODMAN: Venezuela is appearing as a "potential hub of terrorism" in America in the eyes of U.S. officials, according to a congressional report that was released on Thursday. The report says, "According to senior U.S. military and intelligence officials, Venezuela is emerging as a potential hub of terrorism in the western hemisphere, providing assistance to Islamic radicals from the Middle East and other terrorists." It says, "Venezuela has issued thousands of social security cards to people from Cuba, Colombia and Middle Eastern nations that host foreign terrorist organizations," according to the congressional report and Texas Congressman Michael McCall. Your response?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] This is basically an intention to discredit the political process that Venezuela is currently facing. It's not proper to associate our process with any terrorist event or harboring any terrorism.

AMY GOODMAN: If you did get this seat on the UN Security Council, what would you do? Why is this important to you?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] For us, it's very important. We're going to demonstrate that we can face and resist whatever pressure, all the pressure. We are facing this election based on the dignity of the countries of the south. In previous elections we have witnessed, the empires of the United States and Russia has been in back of the election, hiding behind the elections and behind the efforts of the countries to be an independent voices.

AMY GOODMAN: Finally, as we look at the relationship between the United States and Venezuela, yesterday we had a reporter on our broadcast, who wrote a book called Ghost Plane, about the CIA flights taking prisoners to different secret prisons. And one thing he mentioned was that there was evidence of these CIA planes that landed in Venezuela about a month before the attempted coup against Chavez in April of 2002. Do you have any knowledge of this?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We consider that by any means the United States was not allowed to intervene in the coup. And we consider also that they acted according to the information given by the opposition forces in our country.

AMY GOODMAN: Are you saying that you have information that the U.S. was involved?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We have several informations, but I think that it will be arising [inaudible] in the next future. But he said that basically the United States acted, cheated by the military opposes forces and the opposition parties in Venezuela.

AMY GOODMAN: So, there is now a time out between you and Guatemala until next week, after these 35 rounds of voting?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We have five days for our campaign, so we are going to take advantage of it to have bilateral meetings with countries and to explain to them our real purposes. I think that we are going to essentially take advantage of this.

AMY GOODMAN: And you'll begin again next week in the rounds of voting?

FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS: [translated] We're going to resume on Wednesday, and there will be two elections in the morning. And the rest of the week, they will develop the ordinary work of the General Assembly.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to thank you very much for being with us, Francisco Arias Cardenas, Venezuela's ambassador to the United Nations. Luisa Golindano, thank you for translating.

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