
Mexico and Brazil Agendas and Achievements

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For the fourth time since the United Nations was created and the second time in a decade, Mexico is a non-permanent member of its most important body,

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the Security Council (SC). When it began its fourth term in 2009, Mexico was accompanied by Costa Rica in representation of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean. At the end of Costa Rica's term, on December 31, 2009, its seat was occupied by Brazil, which will remain in the SC until December 2011.

Although comparisons may be odious, many times they are necessary to adjust directions, in this case, of Mexico's foreign policy. While Mexico has been a member of the SC four times, Brazil has been a member 10 times: 1946-1947,

1951-1952, 1954-1955, 1963-1964, 1967-1968, 1988-1989, 1993-1994, 1998-1999, 2004-2005, and 2010-2011. Only Japan has been a member as often.

Mexico has had a low-profile agenda, focusing mainly on four issues: illicit trafficking in small and light arms; improving the situation in Haiti; strengthening mediation in conflict resolution; and protecting child soldiers in armed conflicts. These are all important topics, although the material and human resources the country can commit to furthering this agenda seem insufficient.

Let us compare that agenda with Brazil's. Before its latest election as a non-permanent member, Brazil announced the following as its objectives, among others: contributing to conciliation in Haiti, where it heads the 1700-person-strong United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), including military, civilian, and police personnel from 17 nations.¹ Its presence has become crucial in the face of the devastating earthquake that hit this Antillean nation in early 2010. Brazil also wants to help with the solution of the crisis in Guinea Bissau, a Portuguese-speaking country on the West Coast of Africa, which became critical after the March 2, 2009 death of President João Bernardo Vieira, very possibly at the hands of his own armed forces. In addition, Brazil wants to contribute to the peace processes in the Middle East, including specific actions by its President Luíz Inácio (Lula) da Silva in Israel and Palestine.

Other issues that Brazil has been promoting in the Security Council include international humanitarian law; strengthening peacekeeping operations, in which it has played an active part with military and civilian personnel; and a broad security agenda, with a focus on the relationship between security and development. No one has forgotten Brazil and Turkey's work as mediators last May in the crisis arising out of Iran's nuclear program, one of the trickiest issues on the international agenda. Brasilia and Ankara agreed with Teheran that it would deliver 1200 kilograms of low-grade-enriched (3.5 percent) uranium to Turkey, to be deposited under Turkish-Iranian supervision, and that, within a year, Iran would receive 120 kilograms of 20-percent enriched uranium from Russia and France to be used in its civilian nuclear program. Skeptics think this agreement does not resolve what the United States has called "the Iranian challenge," remembering that as soon as it was announced, the Security Council passed—with Mexico's vote—a new round of sanctions against Iran. However, undeniably, Brazil's foreign policy in international relations has created a pro-active image.

The important difference between Mexico and Brazil is that the latter has repeatedly pushed to increase the number of permanent members of the Security Council, with the clear intention of becoming Latin America's "representative." On the eve of the UN's fiftieth anniversary (in 2004 and 2005), Brazil, together with India, Japan, and Germany, formed a group that sought the international community's approval for changes in the composition of the Security Council. They all wanted to become permanent members, even if without veto rights. However, their aspirations were thwarted for several reasons: one was that the so-called "Group of Four's" proposal did not include any African country, even though Africa has 53 votes in the UN General Assembly, but is not represented among SC permanent members.

The next problem came up when different regions questioned the Group of Four's aspirations. Pakistan, for example, claimed the same right as India to aspire to a permanent seat. Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina, among others, presented similar arguments *vis-à-vis* Brazil. In Europe, Italy, which has long aspired to being part of the Security Council, questioned



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Germany's ambitions. And, as if that were not enough, Japan faced—and continues to face—the People's Republic of China's reluctance: as a permanent member, China would not want the Japanese to have similar privileges; plus it shares the objections of other countries like South Korea, based on the abuses perpetrated by Tokyo during World War II.

But in addition to Brazil's aspirations *vis-à-vis* the Security Council, there are profound differences between Itamarati and Tlatelolco's diplomacy. Suffice it to mention that President "Lula" da Silva has made 189 trips abroad, surpassing his predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso's record of 115. So, the man who is still president of Brazil has traveled a large part of the globe and possesses a visibility and leadership seldom seen among Latin American heads of state. By contrast, since the beginning of his term, President Felipe Calderón decided to put the priority on the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime, giving foreign policy short shrift. Only the environment seems to have been an interest of the

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Calderón administration, judging by the fact that he has pushed an agenda that seeks to forge a consensus around the commitments to lower polluting emissions in matters of climate change following the Kyoto Protocol. However, compared to Brazil, Mexico's visibility in the world is very slight.

As if that were not enough, Brazil has taken advantage of vacuums in Mexico's activity, even in areas traditionally reserved to Mexican diplomacy, like Central America. Brazil's actions in the face of the 2009 Honduran crisis, when the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa hosted deposed President Manuel Zelaya, is only one example. Central America is part of Mexico's security zone, which is why Brazil's actions in the region have done nothing but reinforce Mexican foreign policy's image of being defenseless and paralyzed.

It is worth asking, then, what Mexico learned from its most recent participation in the Security Council. At first glance, it would seem that since it is the second time in a decade it participates, Mexico has decided on a course of greater ac-

tivism. However, if it plans a "speedy" return to the Security Council, it is important that it clearly define its priorities and put an end to uncertainty on important topics like its participation in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) or on multilateral sanctions that the SC levies against those who violate international peace and security. On both these issues, Mexico is in limbo, and this is serious considering how frequently both PKOs and sanctions are part of Security Council actions to mitigate international conflicts.

Other no less important recommendations include the need for better planning of Mexican participation in the Security Council, both in terms of how often it tries to do so and the issues it wants to influence. It should find "niche agendas," that is, topics traditionally ignored by the great powers but relevant for the rest of the international community that can be promoted jointly with different nations. Consequently, it will be important to promote greater negotiation and understanding with the council's permanent and non-permanent members, including the People's Republic of China and other developing countries that in principle have like aspirations and situations.

No less important is it to remember that, given that a large part of the humanitarian crises take place in Africa, Mexico should improve its knowledge of and presence on that continent, still marginal in its foreign policy, judging by Felipe Calderón's National Development Plan.

A correctly structured strategy would allow Mexico to visualize possible alliances inside the Security Council to promote certain issues vital to its national interest. On January 1, 2011, Mexico will be replaced by Colombia, and four other countries will also become non-permanent members for two years: South Africa, India, Germany, and Portugal. If we take into account that they will be joining Brazil and Nigeria (elected for 2010-2011), this creates the most influential group since the SC was created, outside the permanent members. These are the main regional powers of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, something not seen every day.

It is reasonable to suppose that one of the issues these countries will promote will be the reform of the UN itself, given that all of them, with the possible exception of Portugal, aspire to being permanent SC members. This can be a double-edged sword because just as it could bring a breath of fresh air to the debate on the democratization of the United Nations, it could also generate tensions in the Security Council, even replacing other important matters that its members should deal with.

Since 2009, Mexico has been accompanied on the Security Council by Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Libya, and Vietnam (which concluded their terms in 2009), and Austria, Japan, Turkey, and Uganda (whose terms end in 2010). When the countries whose term ended in 2009 left their seats on January 1, 2010, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gabon, Liberia, and Nigeria replaced them. Most of them are countries Mexico does not have fluid relations with, in many cases because of simple unfamiliarity, or which are rivals, like Brazil. By contrast, Brazil is fortunate, first of all for having a national project and clear vision about the role its foreign policy plays in it. But also, it seems favored by circumstances since countries with which it has created an intense dialogue and with which it shares aspirations are its fellow members of the highest political body of the planet's most important international institution.

In view of this, Mexico will have to carry out a profound review of its aspirations and interests in the world before

running again for election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, all the time fostering the reform of the UN, because, ironically, despite its low profile in international relations, on this particular issue, it is right.

The reform of the United Nations cannot just be understood as just increasing the number of permanent members of the Security Council. It must be much more than that: a comprehensive reform to improve the efficiency of different bodies, programs, and specialized agencies of the UN system, and that strengthens those that operate appropriately. Mexico is not alone in this aspiration, but if it does not look at the world and persists in isolating itself, its voice will not be heard by the community of nations. **VM**

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¹ See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/>.
[Editor's Note.]