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Portugal and the Security Council: Is This Seat Taken?

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Introduction

Adlai E. Stevenson, a politician and a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in the 1960's, once said "the whole basis of the United Nations is the right of all nations – great or small – to have weight, to have a vote, to be attended to". The regular election of different countries to the non-permanent seats of the United Nations Security Council fits this spirit. Indeed, on a regular basis, countries of all sorts of 'shapes and sizes' submit their candidacy to the Security Council. In theory and in principle, Lebanon has the same chances of being a Security Council non-permanent member during a biennium as Brazil or Japan. Characteristics such as size, location, population, culture, or regime type theoretically do not matter, although they tend to matter in practice. A successful candidacy may depend of several factors, but the truth is that all United Nations member states can run for a seat in the Security Council.

Portugal is currently promoting its candidacy, along with Canada and Germany. Whether it will be successful remains to be seen, but this article is a (provisional) description and analysis of the ongoing Portuguese candidacy. It begins with a brief description of the logistics of the electoral procedures behind the selection of non-permanent members of the Security Council. The subsequent section provides the background for the

Portuguese candidacy. In particular, it presents a short description of Portugal's previous terms in the Security Council. Afterwards, it will examine Lisbon's current strategy and the path taken so far to achieve a seat in the Security Council in 2011-2012. It then moves on to explain the Portuguese arguments in favor of the country's candidacy, while in the next section assessing the arguments of Portugal's opponents. Finally, this article outlines a tentative agenda for Portugal during the biennium, and ends with some brief considerations on the prospects of the Portuguese candidacy.

Security Council: Electoral Procedures

Next October, the United Nations General Assembly will meet and vote by secret ballot to elect several new non-permanent members of the Security Council. The elected countries will serve a non-renewable two-year term, starting on 1 January 2011 and ending on 31 December 2012.¹ Following the General Assembly's 1963 resolution to maintain geographical balance, the candidates for the ten non-permanent seats of the Security Council

¹ The overall electoral procedures are explained in "Regional Endorsements Result in Competition-free Elections for Security Council" (UNelections Monitor, No. 113, 23 October 2009).



are chosen by five different regional groups: the African Group (three members), Asian Group (two members), Eastern European Group (one member), Group of Latin American and Caribbean (GRULAC, two members) and Group of Western European and Other States (WEOG). Portugal's group is the WEOG, which can choose two members, one of which must come from Western Europe.

Each group has its own set of traditions and practices guiding candidate selection. Although the states' qualifications play a role in the selection procedure, a common feature among groups is the rotation between members. Therefore, power resources are neither the ultimate criteria, nor an insurmountable obstacle. As previous elections have shown, a less powerful state can be chosen to the detriment of a more important one.

With WEOG as an exception, all groups tend to present pre-endorsed candidates. When the General Assembly meets to elect the new non-permanent members of the Security Council, the number of candidates usually matches the seats available, a procedure known as clean slates. Contrarily, WEOG has competition for the disputed seats. In other words, clean slates are unusual – although possible – and campaigns tend to exert a demanding toll. In order to be successful, WEOG's candidates usually have to devote much attention to the matter and spend significant amounts of their time and money.

It is not unusual that candidates announce their intention several years in advance. In doing so, their aim is to gain some advantage over their competitors and block the appearance of additional candidates. After all, there are no limits and, theoretically, the number of candidates could be well above the number of seats in contention.

According to Article 18 of the United Nations Charter, "each member of the General Assembly shall have one vote". In other words, the member's size, population, regime or power resources, among other features, are not criteria taken into account. Each sovereign state has one vote and all else is irrelevant. Moreover, Article

18 also states that "decisions of the General Assembly on important questions shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting". Among the important issues is "the election of the non-permanent members of the Security Council". There are currently 192 member states, which means that – while dependent on the number of states present and voting on that specific day – around 128 votes are needed to guarantee electoral success.

Unlike Security Council permanent member states – the Permanent Five or P5 – non-permanent members do not hold veto power. Even so, being a Security Council non-permanent member is not only a source of international prestige and status, but also a real source of power. Inevitably, being elected to the Security Council was – and will continue to be – a much-sought goal.

The Portuguese-speaking countries are actively lobbying in favor of Portugal's candidature. Brazilian diplomacy has a unique capacity to gather votes in Latin America, and Angola and Mozambique also have significant influence within their regional diplomatic circles. Portugal's bid, in a sense, is a common project involving the Portuguese-speaking countries.

Portugal and the Security Council: Background

The first time that Portugal gave serious thought to the possibility of running for a non-permanent seat at the Security Council was in 1960.² It is still unclear why that era's authoritarian regime took such a bold step. Regardless of the motivation, the result was political humiliation, and Portugal was forced to abandon the race in order to avoid a public defeat. The lesson was fully learned and the Salazar-Caetano regime did not make the same mistake twice.

Portugal's diplomatic interest in the Security Council reemerged only after the transition to democracy in April 1974. Running against Malta, in 1979-1980 Portugal successfully won its first two-year term in the Security Council. Still recovering from the domestic political turbulence lived between 1974 and 1976 and yet to tame the huge economic crisis, the country's first two-year term went almost unnoticed. However, considering the overall design of Portuguese diplomacy at the time, this first two-year term at the Security

² See José Calvet de Magalhães, *Portugal e as Nações Unidas: A Questão Colonial (1955-1974)* (IEEI, Cadernos do Lumiar No. 6, 1996).



Council was another piece of Portugal's strategy towards reaching a symbolical political re-acceptance within the international community as a full member.

The second two-year term took place in 1997-1998. The international context was entirely different. The Cold War was now over and, as a consequence, the challenges and constraints faced by the international community were of a new nature. Moreover, following the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia became the new permanent member of the Security Council. Thus, in 1997, the Security Council was still looking for its role within this new multipolar context.

Portugal, too, was a different country. By now it was a consolidated democracy, fully integrated into the European Union. As former Ambassador António Monteiro recalls, Portugal ran for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council aiming to show a new assertiveness, and willing to take on its share of responsibilities within the international system.³ In other words, fully aware of the changing international security environment since the end of the Cold War, Portugal wished to be identified as a security provider and, therefore, to give its contribution to the United Nations military efforts, namely in peacekeeping operations throughout the world.

Running against Australia and Sweden, this time the seat was harder to secure. Sweden was elected in the first round, leaving Australia and Portugal competing for the second available seat. In the end, Portugal was able to build-up the coalition necessary to defeat Canberra. The Portuguese victory tasted like a political reward, or at least as some sort of recognition. Indeed, in the previous years, Portugal had not only increased its contribution to the United Nations budget, but also became a regular participant in peacekeeping missions, including in Angola and Mozambique.

As always, there was a never-ending list of crises and issues to be dealt with in 1997 and 1998. Among them, Kosovo and the nuclear crisis between India and Pakistan were the most prominent. However, for obvious reasons, Portugal was interested in Angola and Guinea-Bissau in particular, while maintaining a low profile regarding Timor Leste. In the end, Portugal could claim that its term was a success, so much so that Portugal announced almost immediately that would run again for a seat in 2011-2012.

Although this time winning a seat will be much more difficult, there is increasing optimism that the Portuguese strategic priority will be attained. Even bearing in mind that nothing is guaranteed until the election day, the truth is that Portugal is confident that its diplomatic efforts, together with its arguments, will be persuasive enough to secure the much sought seat in the Security Council.

Portugal and the Security Council: Strategy

Indeed, in 2000, Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres announced that Portugal would seek a new term. In 2001 Canada's Prime Minister Jean Chrétien did the same. In the following years it seemed that a clean slate could take place. However, in the autumn of 2006, Germany announced its own competing candidacy, after fulfilling its fourth mandate in 2003-2004. The possibility of a clean slate was over.⁴ The German decision was considered unwelcome and caused some tension between the two European countries.⁵ Since January 2007, a new system for holding the Council of the European Union Presidency has been in place: for each 18-month period, the three presidencies in office during that time must prepare a draft common program. This meant that despite some political tension between Portugal and Germany, they had to deal with each other when they assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, Germany in the first semester and Portugal in the second.

Although Portugal announced its candidacy in 2000, it was only in 2006 that active campaign started. Since then, the President of the Republic, President of the Parliament, Prime

³ He was the Portuguese Permanent Representative at the Security Council in 1997-1998. See António Monteiro, "A presença portuguesa no Conselho de Segurança em 1997-1998" (*Política Internacional*, No. 19, Primavera/Verão 1999): 163-174.

⁴ A clean slate might not occur in 2013-2014 either. At this stage, Australia, Finland and Luxembourg are already in the race for a seat in the Security Council.

⁵ The decision was also criticized by some German diplomats: too soon for some – bearing in mind that Germany was in the Security Council in 2003-2004 – and too undiplomatic for others, considering the clean slate that existed until then.



Minister, Foreign Minister and Secretaries of State have all been deeply involved in lobbying in favor of Portugal's candidature, as well as each ambassador in his or her diplomatic post.

As far as the diplomatic apparatus is concerned, in Lisbon, the Director-General for External Policy, Ambassador Nuno Brito, is in charge of articulating the overall strategy, and the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations, first with Ambassador João Salgueiro and now with Ambassador José Filipe Moraes Cabral, is the main player in the field. The Portuguese embassies in Berlin and Ottawa are responsible for pinpointing any relevant development that might be of interest with regard to Portugal's competitors. And in order to compensate for a lack of diplomatic reach in some areas, Portugal has already sent several roving missions. Retired Ambassador António Monteiro visited several African countries. The Portuguese Ambassador in Venezuela, João Caetano da Silva, also visited a few Central American and Caribbean states, and Ambassador Pedro Catarino did the same in several countries in the Pacific.

Portugal is not alone in this effort. Indeed, the Portuguese-speaking countries – Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, S. Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor Leste – are also actively lobbying in favor of Portugal's candidature. Brazilian diplomacy has a unique capacity to gather votes in Latin America, and Angola and Mozambique also have significant influence within their regional diplomatic circles. Thus, Portugal's bid, in a sense, is a common project involving the Portuguese-speaking countries.

At this stage, more than a hundred declarations of support and various declarations of intent have already been received in support of Portugal's goal. Thus, the 128 votes required to guarantee a non-permanent seat in the Security Council are in reach, even prudently bearing in mind that not all declarations of support or intent are reliable. According to some experts, there is

a violation of the commitments taken around 10% or 15%. Although this time winning a seat will be much more difficult, there is increasing optimism that this strategic priority will be attained. And even bearing in mind that nothing is guaranteed until the election day, the truth is that Portugal is confident that its diplomatic efforts, as well as all bargaining involved, together with its arguments, will be persuasive enough to secure the much sought seat.

Portugal usually emphasizes that it has only been in the Security Council twice, and that it was the first country to announce its candidacy for the 2011-2012 biennium. Portuguese diplomacy uses the size argument. In contrast with Canada and Germany, Portugal is a small state. The election of Portugal would safeguard the right of medium and small states to be present in the Security Council.

Portugal and the Security Council: Arguments

Portugal has several arguments that it uses with different emphasis depending on to whom it is talking. First, it usually emphasizes that it has only been in the Security Council twice, and that it was the first country to announce its candidacy for the 2011-2012 biennium, showing a clarity of intent.⁶ In other words, Canada and Germany announced their candidacies only later on, and therefore Portugal should have precedence. On the other hand, Canada and Germany (since 1973) have already had six and four terms respectively as non-permanent members of the Security Council. Thus, contrary to voting for Ottawa and Berlin, voting for Portugal would guarantee a fair and balanced rotation.

Second, Portuguese diplomacy uses the size argument. In contrast with Canada and Germany, Portugal is a small state. Thus, the election of Portugal would safeguard the right of medium and small states to be present in the Security Council. In other words, unlike the situation of the two other

contenders, electing Portugal would contribute to the representative character of the Security Council. Furthermore, Portugal points out that nowadays the trend goes in the direction of a more inclusive G20. The election of Canada and Germany would be more inclined toward a return to the past, i.e. the G8. Thus, the election

⁶ "Portugal: Candidate to the United Nations Security Council 2011-2012" (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros).



of Portugal would be much more in consonance with the spirit of the G20 in terms of broader, more inclusive and heterogeneous representation.

Third, Portugal highlights its significant contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations, bearing in mind its GDP *per capita* and its size. So far, Portugal has participated in 20 peacekeeping operations all around the world. Indeed, nowadays Portugal is ranked as the #1 United Nations police contributor among Western countries. In January 2010, Portugal even earned a respectable 43rd place in the United Nations' top contributors list with its 350 military and police personnel, surpassing the 142 and 287 troops assigned by Canada and Germany in the same period.⁷ In other words, Portugal is a security provider, an active contributor to peacekeeping and peacemaking.

Fourth, Portugal emphasizes its experience as an active participant in several regional and trans-regional multilateral institutions, such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, NATO, OSCE, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), OECD, the Ibero-American Summit, the Euro-Med Forum, the Organization of American States, and so on. Besides experience, Portuguese diplomats insist that all of this confers to the country a unique capacity to promote dialogue between different civilizations, cultures, continents and regions. In other words, Portugal emphasizes that its global aptitude confers to the country a natural bridge-builder capacity. Indeed, there is a historical legacy that is highly relevant, and as a consequence Portugal has special connections with dozens of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Fifth, Portuguese diplomats point out that Portugal has always been a staunch supporter of international law, effective multilateralism and the primacy of the United Nations in international affairs. Therefore, if elected, Portugal will continue to do the same, speaking and acting against unlawful attitudes and decisions in world politics, unilateralism and procedures that wish to bypass the United Nations. In other words, Portugal wishes to prove that Thucydides' observation, that "the

strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must", is wrong.

Portugal also emphasizes its relation with the sea. As a coastal nation, the Portuguese diplomats emphasize that they have a unique sensibility towards all matters related with the sea, such as piracy, illegal fisheries, climate change, as well as the rise of the sea level, among other issues.

Last but not the least, Portugal underscores its voting pattern during previous mandates in the Security Council in order to show its independence, moderation, and commitment to finding balanced solutions in world politics. Essentially, Portugal accentuates its commitment to global peace and security.

Overall, the first three arguments seem to be the most compelling, and the ones that might make a difference. However, if not all of them, at least some votes will be decided by comparing the pros and cons of each candidate. Thus a comparison with Canada and Germany is necessary.

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Portugal and the Security Council: The Other Contenders

According to media reports, at one point Canada's candidacy was uncertain. Jean Chrétien's Liberal government announced in 2001 that Canada would run for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council, but it seems that the current Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, had second thoughts about it between 2006 and 2008. Regardless, Canada has continued forward and is

currently contending for one of the seats at stake. Among the arguments used to promote its candidacy is the fact that Ottawa is a major contributor to all of the United Nations' key areas of activity. Secondly, Canada is a security provider, and by doing so contributes to peace and security in world politics. Thirdly, Canadian diplomats emphasize the country's experience as an active participant in foreign affairs. Finally, Ottawa points out that as a non-permanent member, it would push for greater transparency in the work of the Security Council, and support a reform of the United Nations.

Ottawa emphasizes that the General Assembly should not elect two countries from the European Union. The election of Germany and Portugal would lead to a du-

⁷ "Ranking of Military and Police Contributions to UN Operations" (United Nations, 31 January 2010).



plication of representation. However, Canada and Germany are from an economic and geopolitical point of view much more alike than those of Germany and Portugal. Indeed, if the goal is to promote some level of diversity, contrary to Canada's arguments, it is precisely the election of Germany and Portugal that would guarantee such heterogeneous representation in the Security Council.

It seems that Canada will have some trouble with several African states, as under Harper, Canada has cut development aid. And although the country has doubled its aid overall, Canada cut the list of receivers by half, a decision that was coldly received in several African capitals. Also under Harper, Ottawa reinforced its support of Israel within the United Nations, a decision that was immediately noticed by the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Moreover, Canada was among the few countries that voted against the United Nations General Assembly's resolution calling for independent investigations to be conducted by Israel and Hamas on allegations of war crimes described in the Goldstone report. Canada's diplomatic difficulties, of course, are the gain of the other candidates, Germany and Portugal. Among the three contenders, Berlin is by far the one with the most powerful diplomatic network, as well as the one with more resources to support its candidacy. As an internationally respected player, Germany is expected to win one of the two seats available. One of the arguments put forth by Germany quite often is the country's global engagement in world affairs. The German diplomatic corps is quite experienced and deeply involved in foreign affairs and the country is a reliable partner and security provider.

Also, Germany emphasizes the fact that it is the United Nations' third-largest contributor and the world's second-largest donor of development assistance. Therefore the next logical and fair step, with such credentials, would be to elect Germany to the Security Council. After all, those countries which make the biggest contributions towards achieving United Nations' goals should be represented in the Security Council.

If elected, Portugal will hold the presidency twice. As a non-permanent member, Portugal might be involved in negotiations aimed at safeguarding its national interests. As a result, during the entire biennium, Portuguese diplomacy will be able to exert political leverage on issues that are of particular interest for the country.

Moreover, Germany also emphasizes its commitment to international law, the defense of human rights, and the protection of the environment, especially concerning the issues of climate change, scarcity of resources and food crises.

Finally, the German diplomats usually point out their continuous defense of a broader reform of the United Nations, and in particular of the Security Council. The overall goal is to adapt the United Nations to the new post-Cold War balance of power in world affairs, while

at the same time paving the way towards a much desired permanent seat in the Security Council for Germany alongside the P5, instead of relying on successive terms as a non-permanent member. There is an element of irony here as a country that wishes to belong to the aristocracy of the Security Council permanent members must still submit itself to the democracy of non-permanent members.

Portugal and the Security Council: Tentative Agenda

Presidency of the Security Council rotates on a monthly basis among both permanent and non-permanent member states. The president of the Security Council sets the agenda. During the 2011-2012 biennium, if elected, Portugal will hold the presidency twice. In other words, there will be two particular moments when Portugal will have reinforced capacity to influence the Security Council's agenda. However, as a non-permanent member, even without holding the presidency, Portugal might be involved in negotiations aimed at

safeguarding its national interests. As a result, during the entire biennium, Portuguese diplomacy will be able to exert political leverage on issues that are of particular interest for the country. Thus, even bearing in mind that crises are unpredictable and quite often occur when least expected, it is possible for Portugal to set up its own tentative agenda for 2011-2012:

Security Council reform.

Portugal should actively support any discussion that favors the enlargement of the Security Council. In particu-



lar, it should support Brazil, India and Africa's demands for a permanent seat. Furthermore, Portugal should support all initiatives regarding the United Nations' working procedures that promote greater transparency and accountability.

UNIOGBIS.

Portuguese diplomacy should do its utmost to avoid any attempt of disengagement regarding Guinea-Bissau. It should always emphasize the need for a long-term United Nations commitment regarding Bissau.

UNMIT.

As above, Portugal should also work actively to guarantee the maintenance of the United Nations in Timor Leste. Previous attempts at disengagement proved to be a wrong policy. The same mistake should not be made twice.

MINURSO.

While in the Security Council, Portugal should support Morocco regarding Western Sahara. The Maghreb should be the fourth pillar of Portugal's foreign policy, and Morocco in particular is a key partner.

MONUC.

Keeping in mind Angola's regional interests as well as its own, Portuguese diplomacy, in concert with Luanda, should follow the United Nations agenda concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo.

UNIFIL.

Portugal is among its contributors, and therefore should follow carefully any new developments. Lebanon is the tail that wags the dog in the Middle East. If it becomes out of control, unpredictable repercussions and spillover effects are unavoidable.

United Nations Law of the Sea.

Piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden has exposed a weakness in the Law of the Sea. As the northern part of the Mozambique Channel is nowadays also a

threatened area, Portugal should support updating the Law of the Sea, as well as renewed discussions regarding the establishment of a maritime peacekeeping force for Somalia.

Global commons.

Portugal should support and promote any initiative that involves the protection and improvement of global commons such as water and energy.

A seat on the Security Council will give Portugal additional visibility in world affairs, and provide a unique opportunity to promote its role as a geopolitical and geostrategic diplomatic pivot. On some occasions Portugal will be able to influence the agenda and perform the role of a friendly bridge between the Security Council and Portugal's allies, in particular the Portuguese-speaking countries.

Portuguese as an official language.

While in the Security Council, Portugal should not waste any opportunity to lobby in favor of making Portuguese an official language of the United Nations.

The list above is not meant to provide an exhaustive description of potential topics for consideration, but only to highlight some of the key issues, regarding Portuguese national interests, that will be – or should be – on the Security Council agenda during the 2011-2012 biennium. If Portuguese diplomacy is able to perform the role of main representative of the national interests of those countries involved, then it will be promoting its own national interests, and in the process acquiring additional resources of power. After all, being a non-permanent member of the Security Council is not only about pride, status and prestige.

Conclusion

Indeed, a seat on the Security Council will give Portugal additional visibility in world affairs, and provide a unique opportunity to promote its role as a geopolitical and geostrategic diplomatic pivot. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, on some occasions Portugal will be able to influence the agenda and perform the role of a friendly bridge between the Security Council and Portugal's allies, in particular the Portuguese-speaking countries. Clearly, a seat on the Security Council will be a source of additional political and diplomatic power. Indeed, it will allow for greater and more successful efforts towards safeguarding Por-



tuguese national interests. Furthermore, it will also give to Portugal an improved capacity to bargain within the United Nations' universe of agencies, as well as with third parties, in order to guarantee the outputs desired. In short, if elected once again, Portugal will be a more relevant player in Europe, Latin America, the Maghreb, and Southern Africa.

Portugal faces two strong opponents. Both Canada and Germany have powerful diplomatic networks, as well as additional resources to reinforce their strategies. However, Portuguese diplomacy also has some strong arguments backing up its candidacy, and is doing as much as it can to achieve a successful outcome, including the horse-trading that usually takes place. Additionally, Portugal also put its money where its mouth

is, reinforcing its budget this year in support of its candidature.

The political and diplomatic commitment is quite clear, with all relevant political and diplomatic players involved at this stage in the Portuguese campaign. Indeed, personal networks are crucial to win a favorable final result. It is not a coincidence that, since last year, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Luís Amado, has had a fully loaded diplomatic agenda, with dozens and dozens of meetings at the highest level. Yet, a successful election is far from guaranteed. As former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon once said "if you take no risks, you will suffer no defeats. But if you take no risks, you win no victories". Portugal has chosen to take risks and face uncertainty. It is certainly worth a try.

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