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The Appointment of Ban-Ki Moon as UN Secretary-General

One World Trust background briefs for the 1 for 7 billion campaign

Tina Bertrand

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The political context

Management and leadership reform were primary considerations during the 2006 election of the United Nations Secretary-General. Reform momentum was at an all-time high following the 2005 World Summit, at which UN Member States offered dramatic reforms in several of the UN's commissions.¹ The US in particular wanted to reform UN leadership, especially after the Oil-for-Food scandal revealed UN mismanagement at the highest levels, and resulted in Saddam Hussein's government pocketing billions illegally.² Moreover, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his son both were implicated in the scandal. Annan was cleared of the accusation that he used his influence to steer a multimillion dollar contract to a company that employed his son, but he was faulted for not considering the potential for a conflict of interest.³ In addition to the scandal, Annan found himself in direct opposition to the US government for publicly criticizing the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which lacked UN approval.⁴ This scandal- and tension-laden context strongly suggested that the next Secretary-General would have to have a personality and management style that differed from that of Annan.

Important considerations and issues at stake

While the UN Charter is vague as to qualifications for serving as Secretary-General, the General Assembly formalized an emphasis on regional rotation and gender equity in 1997.^{5,6} By 2006, four of the five regions had held this top UN post at least once, the only exception was Eastern Europe which indicated a strong desire to be given its turn, but a 2001 deal struck between the Asian and African groups over Kofi Annan's re-election guaranteed that the next Secretary-General would be from Asia.

1. At the World Summit, the UN created a Peacebuilding Commission, and replaced its troubled Human Rights Commission with a new, and more accountable, Human Rights Council. United Nations General Assembly, A/Res/60/1, 24 October, 2005 (New York: United Nations Publications), paras 97 and 157.
2. For a concise yet thoughtful discussion on the Oil-for-Food scandal, see "Corruption at the Heart of the United Nations," *The Economist*, 9 August, 2005, <http://www.economist.com/node/4267109>, retrieved 27 March, 2016.
3. "Annan Cleared in Oil-for-Food Inquiry," *The Guardian*, World News Section, 30 March, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/30/ewenmacaskill> (accessed 27 March, 2016).
4. "Iraq War Illegal, Says Annan," *BBC News*, Front Page Edition, September 16, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm (accessed 29 March, 2016).
5. See brief no. 1 in this series on the institutional context of searches for a UN Secretary-General.
6. United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/51/241, 22 August, 1997 (New York: United Nations Publications), para 59.

Candidates, campaigns, and coalitions

Competing for the Secretary-General position in 2006 were current and former UN insiders: Shashi Tharoor (India), Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan), and Jayantha Dhanapala (Sri Lanka). Additional candidates holding high political office in their respective countries included: Ashraf Ghani (Afghanistan), Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (Latvia, and the only female candidate), Ban Ki-moon (South Korea), and Surakiart Sathirathai (Thailand).

Surakiart was first to enter the race, and he even received formal endorsement from the regional organization, ASEAN.⁷ Ashraf Ghani and Vīķe-Freiberga were the last to enter the race, both declaring their candidacies in September, after informal voting had already commenced. Of all the candidates, Ban Ki-moon was the only one to travel to all fifteen countries represented in the Security Council to promote his candidacy.

The Security Council held its first straw poll of the candidates on 24 July, 2006. The votes were to “encourage,” “discourage,” or offer “no opinion” on, each candidate.⁸ During this first ballot, the two clear front-runners were Ban Ki-moon and Shashi Tharoor.⁹ In the second straw poll on 14 September, Ban expanded his lead, with two additional encouraging votes, while Tharoor received yet another discouraging vote.¹⁰ During this round, Zeid finished fourth, and was viewed for the first time as a possible comprise candidate. The third straw poll -- also held in September -- showed yet another change among the top contenders: Ban lost one encouraging vote and Tharoor lost two more encouraging votes, while Vīķe-Freiberga soared to third place, having just entered the race. Her rise in this third straw poll also signaled the effective end to all other candidates' bids, as their discouraging votes outnumbered their encouraging votes.¹¹

The final straw poll, held on 2 October, revealed that Ban was the only candidate with zero discouraging votes, and that he had no opposition from any of the five permanent Security Council members.¹² The formal vote took place a week later, so as to allow other candidates to enter the race, and/or the remaining candidates to withdraw. Between 2 October and 9 October, all remaining candidates formally withdrew from the race, and no new candidates declared, leaving Ban the sole candidate for consideration on 9 October.¹³ The Security Council promptly voted to recommend Ban Ki-moon as their choice for Secretary-General to the General Assembly. The General Assembly obliged, and elected Ban Ki-moon the UN's eighth Secretary-General on 13 October, 2006.

Why did Ban Ki-moon win?

Ban Ki-moon ultimately was the unanimous choice of the UN Security Council for several important reasons. First and foremost, he was the only candidate acceptable to all five permanent members of the Security Council. Ban's main competition suffered from close association with

7. ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

8. A straw poll is an informal ballot to gauge the extent of support for, or opposition to, particular candidates. This practice began in 1981, and in 1991, color-coded ballots were added during the final straw poll to differentiate between elected and permanent Security Council members' preferences.

9. Ban received 12 encouraging votes, 1 discouraging vote, and 2 no opinion votes. Tharoor received 10 encouraging votes, 2 discouraging votes, and 3 no opinion votes. Surakiart received 7 encouraging votes, 3 discouraging votes, and 5 no opinion votes. The fourth runner-up -- Dhanapala -- received 5 encouraging votes, 6 discouraging votes, and 4 no opinion votes. “Ban Takes First Straw Poll,” *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/07/ban-takes-1st-straw-poll/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).

10. “Ban Firms up Lead in Second Straw Poll,” *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/09/ban-firms-up-lead-in-second-straw-poll/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).

11. “Ban Slips But Holds, Vīķe-Freiberga Pushes into Third,” *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/09/ban-slips-but-holds-vike-freiberga-pushes-into-third/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).

12. “Ban Ki-moon Wins,” *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/10/first-color-coded-straw-poll-results/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).

13. Tharoor withdrew his candidacy shortly after the fourth straw poll results were announced, Zeid and Ghani withdrew on 4 October, and Surakiart and Vīķe-Freiberga withdrew on 5 October. “Afterthoughts,” *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/10/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).

Annan. Indian media sources asserted that the US opposed another UN-trained Secretary-General, and especially Tharoor, who was a mentee of outgoing Secretary-General Kofi Annan, having served in Annan's executive office. Tharoor's candidacy also was perceived by the US ambassador as a violation of an unwritten UN rule that Secretary-Generals should come from small countries.¹⁴ Viķe-Freiberga's prospects also may have been tainted by association with Annan, who had added her to his team of global political leaders to promote his comprehensive reform agenda in 2005.¹⁵ Viķe-Freiberga's nationality also damaged her chances at winning the top UN post, as the Security Council seemed intent on electing an Asian, regardless of gender or regional considerations.

Surakiart, who came in third during the first straw poll, saw his prospects fade when the Thai military launched a coup d'état against the very government that nominated Surakiart for the Secretary-General position. Zeid's campaign was plagued by lack of consensus on whether the Middle East properly fit into the Asian regional bracket. As a result, Zeid did not receive full support from countries within his own region. Qatar voted for Ban, and suffered a diplomatic row with Jordan over its vote.¹⁶ This mirrored the dilemma faced by Boutros Boutros-Ghali (an Egyptian) when he ran for the office of Secretary-General as an African candidate in the early 1990s. While Egypt is located in Africa, many sub-Saharan African countries did not fully accept Boutros-Ghali as a truly African representative.¹⁷

Why was Ban Ki-moon Re-elected?

Ban Ki-moon announced his intention to seek re-election in June 2011, and he was unanimously supported by the Security Council. Ban had no rivals for the top UN post in 2011. Analysts argue that Ban easily won the support of the Security Council because of his quiet deference to them. Moreover, Ban retained the good will of many countries through his willingness to travel to them rather than hold court in New York. With regard to his substantive work, Ban has been praised for his leadership on climate change, HIV/AIDS, women's rights, and in his promotion of democracy during the Arab Spring. Perhaps more importantly, he also has managed to sustain US support, something which no other Secretary-General has been able to manage throughout their complete tenures as Secretary-General.¹⁸

The One World Trust promotes education, training and research into the changes required within global organisations in order to make them answerable to the people they affect and ensure that international laws are strengthened and applied equally to all. Its guiding vision is a world where all peoples live in peace and security and have equal access to opportunity and participation.

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14. The US Ambassador to the UN clearly stated this as one of his main objections to Tharoor's bid in his memoir. John Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (Threshold Editions, 2008), 277-278.
15. "Latvian President Named Envoy to Help Promote Annan's Reform Agenda Ahead of UN Summit," UN News Centre, 12 April, 2005, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=13946#.Vv20IPkrLIU> (accessed 25 March, 2016).
16. After the votes were revealed, Jordan recalled its ambassador to Qatar, claiming betrayal on Qatar's part. "Zeid, Ghani Leave the Field; Jordan Recalls Envoy over Vote," *Who Will Be the Next Secretary-General?*, <http://www.unsg.org/wordpress/2006/10/zeid-ghani-leave-the-field/> (accessed 26 March, 2016).
17. For additional commentary on perceptions versus geography, see Ian Williams, "Jordanian Ambassador Prince Zeid Among Candidates to Succeed Kofi Annan," *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, Magazine Section, November 2006, 38-39.
18. See, for example, Falk's analysis in Pamela Falk, "Ban Ki-moon Re-elected as U.N. Secretary-General," CBS News, 21 June, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ban-ki-moon-reelected-as-un-secretary-general/> (retrieved 26 March, 2016). See also the various chapters that describe in detail when and why Secretaries-General lost favor with the US in Simon Chesterman, ed., (2007), *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).