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Three Priorities for the New Secretary-General of the United Nations

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United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon faces enormous challenges in his new office. The U.N. is expected to help address the world's most vexing problems, including threats to international peace and security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, development, disease, and assistance in the wake of natural disasters. Yet its flaws and weaknesses undermine its ability to meet these challenges. Three major scandals in recent years—the corruption of the Iraqi Oil-for-Food program, sexual abuse committed by U.N. peacekeepers, and corruption and mismanagement in U.N. procurement—clearly illustrate the need for management reform, stronger oversight and accountability, and reexamination of U.N. priorities and organization to bolster effectiveness. After years of talk and multiple reports on reform, however, substantive reform has been minimal.

It is past time for fundamental reform of the United Nations. Three priorities deserve the new Secretary-General's immediate attention: replacing senior U.N. leadership with people committed to overhauling the organization, reinvigorating the drive to improve the management and fundamental day-to-day operations of the U.N., and confronting the rampant ethical lapses of U.N. peacekeepers and adopting reforms to prevent their recurrence. The United States should work with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to implement new policies that are within his authority and to press the General Assembly to adopt many of the positive proposals now circulating.

More Secretary, Less General

The chief responsibilities of the Secretary-General must be clarified before the new Secretary-General's priorities can be addressed. Secretary-General Ban's predecessor, Kofi Annan, regarded his chief responsibility to be his role as “a political instrument of the Security Council, the General Assembly and other United Nations organs,” with administering the United Nations Secretariat finishing a poor second. In a March 7 report, Annan complained, “I am expected to be the world's chief diplomat and at the same time to run a large and complex Organization, as it were, in my spare time.”¹ While this viewpoint is hardly unique to Annan, it is unsupported by the U.N. Charter. The U.N. Charter assigns the Secretary-General only one function—to be the U.N.'s “chief administrative officer,” not its principal diplomatic official.²

The job of chief administrative officer of the U.N. is not easy; to the contrary, it may be one of the most difficult jobs in the world. The United Nations has major responsibilities. It employs over 9,000 people of all nationalities and spends \$7 billion per year in its regular and peacekeeping budgets—more than the individual 2004 gross

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domestic products of 72 U.N. Member States.³ It runs 18 peacekeeping missions involving nearly 100,000 personnel.⁴ Some of these missions, including the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), established in Jerusalem in 1948, and the U.N. Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, (UNMOGIP) established in 1949, date back decades and are older than two-thirds of Member States. The Secretary-General is expected to oversee all of this while lacking the authority to shift resources and personnel to meet waxing and waning priorities, while burdened by antiquated mandates, regulations, and human resource practices, and while working under the constraints of Member States that have resisted efforts to address these problems or to improve oversight, transparency, and accountability.

Given these problems, it is hardly surprising that the U.N. has often failed in its responsibilities. Recent, well-publicized scandals illustrate the many problems that continue to plague the world body. For instance, investigations found some 200 instances of alleged procurement mismanagement and fraud in peacekeeping operations.⁵ Additionally, bribes and kickbacks to the tune of \$2 billion under the Iraqi Oil-for-Food program involved over 2,000 companies in nearly 70 countries while

the U.N. failed to act.⁶ Given the evident flaws of the organization, the first priority of a chief administrative officer must be to reform the organization. While there are many areas in need of reform, three demand priority attention.

Priority 1: Making Appointments To Lead and Reform the Organization

Improving the U.N. starts with appointing energetic, experienced people committed to reforming the organization and to preventing the repetition of past scandals and failings. Upon taking office, Secretary-General Ban promised to focus on appointing capable people to lead the organization:

One of my core tasks will be to breathe new life and inject renewed confidence into the sometimes weary Secretariat. As Secretary-General, I will aim to reward the talent and skill of staff, while making optimal use of their experience and expertise.... The Charter calls on staff to uphold the highest levels of efficiency, competence and integrity, and I will seek to ensure to build a solid reputation for living up to that standard.⁷

In a welcome sign, Ban requested that all Assistant and Under-Secretaries-General—except those whose “appointments are subject to action/consul-

1. “Investing in the United Nations: For a Stronger Organization Worldwide,” Secretary-General’s Report on Management Reform Report, United Nations Document A/60/692, March 7, 2006, p. 20, at www.daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/251/77/PDF/N0625177.pdf.
2. Article 97, Charter of the United Nations, at www.un.org/aboutun/charter.
3. In December 2005, the General Assembly approved the \$3.8 billion biennial regular budget, which includes nearly \$1.9 billion for 2006. See “General Assembly Adopts 2006-2007 Budget of \$3.79 Billion,” General Assembly document GA/10442, Department of Public Information, December 23, 2005, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/ga10442.doc.htm. U.N. peacekeeping costs were about \$5 billion in the last fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2006. “United Nations Peacekeeping: Meeting New Challenges,” United Nations, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q9.htm. GDP data from World Bank Development Indicators database.
4. “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, October 31, 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm.
5. For an assessment of the U.N. procurement scandal, see U.N. General Assembly, “Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Comprehensive Management Audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations,” A/60/717, March 13, 2006, at www.daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/269/62/PDF/N0626962.pdf.
6. For information on the Oil-for-Food program, see Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., “The Final Volcker Oil for Food Report: An Assessment,” Heritage Foundation WebMemo No. 913, November 10, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm913.cfm.
7. “On taking oath of office, Secretary-General-designate Ban Ki-moon says loyalty, discretion, conscience will be watchwords for carrying out duties,” Department of Public Information, United Nations Document SG/2119 and GA/10558, December 14, 2006, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2006/sg2119.doc.htm.

tation by or with the appropriate intergovernmental bodies”—offer their resignation. According to the press release, Ban will “review the offers of resignation and may decide to retain the experience of some senior officials to assist him in the discharge of his responsibilities.”⁸ This course of action, advocated by former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton, will smooth the process of putting Ban’s new team in position quickly. He should be commended for taking this unusual step.⁹

Ban has done less well in the next part of the process—namely, appointing qualified, experienced individuals capable of reforming the U.N. Among Ban’s first appointments, several raise concerns:

- **Asha-Rose Migiro:** Ban appointed Migiro, a Tanzanian, as Deputy Secretary-General. Migiro is a former academic who served five years as Tanzania’s Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children and was appointed Tanzanian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in January 2006. According to his spokesman, Ban will delegate many of his management and administrative responsibilities to Migiro.¹⁰ While Migiro may possess some management skills, she has little experience working in or on United Nations issues. Ban would have done better to appoint someone more familiar with the U.N. in order to more quickly address the stalled reform effort.
- **Alicia Barcena Ibarra:** Ibarra, a Mexican environmentalist, was appointed Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, responsible for proposing and implementing internal management reform. Barcena is a long-serving U.N. insider, most recently serving as Annan’s chief of staff, and a protégé of ex-U.N. official Maurice Strong, the former special adviser to Annan who “resigned his last U.N. post after it was revealed he had received about \$1 million for a family-owned firm that originally came from Saddam Hussein and had ties to the Oil-for-Food scandal.”¹⁴ Prior to working for

8. “Secretary-General Requests Offers of Resignation from Senior Secretariat Officials,” U.N. Department of Public Information, Document SG/SM/10827, January 5, 2007, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sgsm10827.doc.htm.
9. Global Policy Forum, “U.S. Wants Top Aides at the U.N. to Resign When Annan Leaves,” *New York Sun*, June 7, 2006, at www.globalpolicy.org/reform/topics/manage/2006/0607resignations.htm.
10. “Tanzanian Foreign Minister named new UN Deputy Secretary-General,” UN News Centre, January 5, 2007, at www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21166&Cr=Deputy&Cr1=Secretary.
11. Benny Avni, “Ban’s Balancing Act,” *New York Sun*, January 8, 2007, at www.nysun.com/article/46213.
12. Levina Kato, “Tanzania: Deputy UN Boss Spells Out Agenda,” *The Nation* (Nairobi), January 10, 2007, at www.allafrica.com/stories/200701090925.html.
13. “Secretary-General’s encounter with the UN press corps,” Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, January 2, 2007, at www.un.org/apps/sg/offthecuff.asp. After the statement, Ban’s spokesperson clarified, “The Secretary-General is of course aware of the ongoing debate concerning a total ban of the death penalty.... Until the matter is resolved, he respects the right of Member States to have their own positions on it. However, the Secretary-General strongly believes in the wisdom of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states ‘Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.’” See “UN human rights chief calls on Iraq not to hang co-defendants of Saddam,” UN News Centre, January 3, 2007, at www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21147&Cr=iraq&Cr1=

Annan, Barcena served as Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Barcena has no experience as a financial manager or human resources professional—functions that are central to her new responsibilities. According to *The New York Times*, the appointment is “a signal that he does not plan aggressive reforms in the much-criticized bureaucracy.”¹⁵ The decision to appoint Barcena is particularly poor when compared to her supremely qualified predecessor, Christopher Burnham, who had spearheaded the recent U.N. reform effort under Annan and championed the need for greater transparency and accountability.

- **John Holmes:** Ban appointed Holmes, a British diplomat, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, responsible for leading U.N. international aid efforts. Formerly the British Ambassador to France, Holmes moves into one of the top operational positions in the U.N. and will be responsible for overseeing 1,100 staff and a \$128 million budget. Holmes possesses very limited experience in emergency relief work compared to predecessors like Jan Ege-land, who had led Norway’s emergency relief program, or Kenzo Oshima, who had led Japan’s humanitarian aid programs. Holmes was appointed on the suggestion of his close friend, British Prime Minister Tony Blair.¹⁶

None of these appointees are among the best possible candidates for their respective positions. On the contrary, their appointments appear to be politically driven and intended to fill regional and gender quotas. Ban should place greater emphasis

on practical experience and dedication to reform in his future appointments.

Priority 2: Adopting Administrative Reform and Enhanced Transparency and Accountability

In recent years, the United Nations has published a number of documents on U.N. reform. Its many reports are a welcome acknowledgment of the serious flaws and problems that plague the organization, and they offer many useful assessments of its weaknesses as well as remedial recommendations. Little, however, has been done to implement these recommendations.

Indeed, after 10 years of Annan claiming that U.N. reform is a “process, not an event,” those seeking to improve the management and operations of the United Nations are left with a stack of reports and very little in the way of tangible change. Among the few measures implemented are a new ethics office, a whistle-blower protection policy, and new financial disclosure requirements.¹⁷ While these reforms were important, they comprise only a small portion of the reforms necessary to dramatically improve the performance of the U.N. Many important reforms remain undone or incomplete:

- **Modernizing budgetary, financial, and human resource regulations and policies:** Annan’s modernization proposals were delayed by the General Assembly in its vote last May, and progress since has been very slow. For instance, proposals for outsourcing certain U.N. jobs and activities have been indefinitely delayed, and the General Assembly decided not to support a staff buyout.¹⁸

14. Liza Porteus “New Secretary-General Names Non-American to Top U.N. Management Post,” Fox News, January 03, 2007, at www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,241098,00.html.

15. Julia Preston, “Mexican U.N. Insider Gets Manager’s Post,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2007, at www.nytimes.com/2007/01/04/world/04nations.html.

16. Anthony Browne, “UN post for Blairs’ holiday host starts new cronyism row,” *The Times*, January 3, 2007, at www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2528929,00.html.

17. For more information, see Brett D. Schaefer, “The Status of United Nations Reform,” Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 966, October 3, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl966.cfm and Brett D. Schaefer, “Enough Reports: More Action Needed on U.N. Reform,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1988, December 8, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1988.cfm.

18. Irene Martinetti, “Much Needed Change in UN Human Resources Policies Gets a Timid Start,” Center for U.N. Reform Education, December 21, 2006, at www.centerforunreform.org/node/229.

- **Reviewing U.N. mandates:** The U.N. has adopted over 9,000 individual mandates requiring action by the Secretariat. Some of these mandates date back to the 1940s. An ad hoc Informal Working Group on Mandate Review was created but initially focused only on the 399 mandates of the General Assembly that are older than five years and have not been renewed—only about 4 percent of all U.N. mandates.¹⁹ Many Member States resisted reviewing older mandates that had been renewed within the past five years, which comprise over 90 percent of the mandates, but a November 2006 agreement extended review to all mandates over five years old.²⁰ The Informal Working Group was supposed to conclude its work in 2006, but the General Assembly voted in December to extend its deadline into 2007.²¹
- **Improving oversight and accountability:** The U.N.'s oversight and auditing capabilities suffer from a lack of resources and of independence. A key part of the problem is the funding mechanism for the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which subjects the OIOS to political pressure and undermines its independence. The General Assembly has not yet permanently increased OIOS resources, approved additional permanent positions, or reallocated existing positions to the OIOS. The General Assembly has also not yet agreed to the details of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, including its composition, its scope of work, and the process for selecting members.²²

Many reforms remain undone, and so it is troubling that Ban did not mention specific reform objectives in his acceptance speech upon being selected as Secretary-General. Instead he made broad pledges to “stay the course” on U.N. reform by “holding [employees] to the highest standards of professionalism and integrity” and “rewarding hard work and excellence [and] making everyone accountable for his/her own actions.”²³ Similarly, Ban referenced broad reform objectives at his swearing-in ceremony, but avoided endorsing specific reforms:

I will seek to improve our systems for human resource management and career development, offering opportunities for training and mobility. With the United Nations taking on a more and more global role, UN staff members, too, should be able to be more mobile and multifunctional.

At the same time, I will seek to set the highest ethical standard.... The Charter calls on staff to uphold the highest levels of efficiency, competence and integrity, and I will seek to ensure to build a solid reputation for living up to that standard. I assure you that I will lead you by example. In this way, I will work to enhance morale, professionalism and accountability among staff members...²⁴

Ban followed up on his words when he submitted his financial disclosure statement to the U.N. Ethics Office to be reviewed, like those of all staff members required to file such statements, by an

19. For a searchable database of all U.N. mandates, see “Mandate Registry,” The United Nations, at webapps01.un.org/mandatereview/searchStart.doc.htm. For an overview of the mandate review process, see Irene Martinetti, “Sluggish Progress on U.N. Mandate Review,” Center for U.N. Reform Education, August 16, 2006, at www.centerforunreform.org/node/62.

20. “Update: Mandate Review,” Center for U.N. Reform Education, November 29, 2006, at www.centerforunreform.org/node/30.

21. “General Assembly Adopts Assessment Scales for Regular, Peacekeeping Budgets, Capital Master Plan, as it Concludes Main Parts of Sixty-First Session,” Department of Public Information, United Nations Document GA/10566, December 22, 2006, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/ga10566.doc.htm.

22. For a discussion of the issues and concerns, see Irene Martinetti, “Reforming Oversight and Governance of the UN Encounters Hurdles,” Center for U.N. Reform Education, December 1, 2006, at www.centerforunreform.org/node/226.

23. “Acceptance speech by H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon on Appointment as the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations,” October 13, 2006, at www.unsgselection.org/files/BanKiMoon_AcceptanceSpeech_13Oct06.pdf.

24. “On taking oath of office, Secretary-General-designate Ban Ki-moon says loyalty, discretion, conscience will be watchwords for carrying out duties,” Department of Public Information, United Nations Document SG/2119 and GA/10558, December 14, 2006, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2006/sg2119.doc.htm.

external financial firm. Unlike Kofi Annan, Ban agreed to publicly disclose the statement following the review and encouraged other applicable U.N. employees to follow suit.²⁵ He refuses, however, to mandate public disclosure of financial forms for senior officials.

Priority 3: Ending Abuse by U.N. Peacekeepers

One of the central tasks of the United Nations is helping to maintain international peace and security. Since 1990, the United Nations Security Council has approved over 40 new peacekeeping operations. At the end of October 2006, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations led 18 U.N. peacekeeping operations. These missions were spread over four continents. They involved 99,421 personnel, including 72,234 troops and military observers and 8,462 police.²⁶

In recent years, there have been harrowing reports of U.N. peacekeepers and personnel, notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Sudan, committing crimes ranging from rape to forced prostitution of women and young girls. The numbers, as reported by senior U.N. officials, are shocking:

... 319 soldiers, police or civilians serving on missions have been investigated for sexual misconduct over the past three years, and 180 have been dismissed or repatriated.

These numbers do not include allegations levelled at members of the U.N.'s own staff. According to an internal U.N. report, these total 91, including 13 alleged to have had sex with minors, 15 who gave jobs in return

for sex, 17 who had sex with prostitutes, five who face allegations of rape and one person who is alleged to have committed sexual assault.²⁷

The victims of these crimes are refugees—many of them children—who have been terrorized by years of war and look to the U.N. for safety and protection.²⁸ In addition to the horrors that these victims have suffered under the protection of the U.N., such revelations of sexual exploitation and abuse undermine the credibility of U.N. peacekeeping.²⁹

Indeed, a 2005 report described U.N. operations as deeply flawed and recommended a number of steps to punish misconduct, including withholding salaries and requiring nations to pursue legal action against perpetrators. The U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations adopted a new code of conduct and new training for U.N. personnel, and Secretary-General Annan declared a U.N. policy of “zero tolerance” for sexual abuse.³⁰

However, these policies have not greatly improved the situation. Although peacekeepers found guilty of misconduct or criminal activity are now dismissed and sent back to their countries, they are rarely punished. The model status of forces agreement for U.N. troop contributors clearly grants troop-contributing countries jurisdiction over military members participating in U.N. peacekeeping operations, and the U.N. does little when countries fail to investigate, try, and punish those guilty of such crimes. As a result, serious allegations continue to emerge, with the most recent coming from Sudan.³¹

25. “Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on financial disclosure forms,” Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, January 5, 2007, at www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2391.

26. “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, October 31, 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm.

27. Francis Elliott and Ruth Elkins, “UN shame over sex scandal,” *The Independent*, January 7, 2007, at www.news.independent.co.uk/world/politics/article2132576.ece.

28. For information on U.N. peacekeeping abuses, see Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., “The U.N. Peacekeeping Scandal in the Congo: How Congress Should Respond,” Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 868, March 22, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl868.cfm.

29. U.S. Institute of Peace, Task Force on the United Nations, “American Interests and U.N. Reform: Report of the Task Force on the United Nations,” June 2005, pp. 94–96, at www.usip.org/un/report/usip_un_report.pdf.

30. “Zero tolerance’ for UN sex abuse,” BBC News, December 5, 2006, at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6208774.stm.

Sexual exploitation and abuse in U.N. operations undermines the credibility of U.N. peacekeeping and must be addressed through an effective plan and a commitment to end abuses and ensure accountability. Secretary-General Ban must make addressing the problem of sexual misconduct and abuse a priority.

Conclusion

The United Nations is charged with many serious responsibilities and tasks. Millions of individuals around the world rely on the organization for protection and other assistance. But the U.N. has,

at times, proven to be unreliable or even detrimental in discharging those duties. As the chief administrative officer of the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should focus his efforts on improving the organization's ability to undertake those tasks.

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31. Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, "UN staff accused of raping children in Sudan," *The Telegraph*, January 3, 2007, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/02/wsudan03.xml.