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Electing the Next United Nations Secretary-General Is an Opportunity to Press for UN Reform

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According to reports, the United Nations is on course to select its next Secretary-General in October.¹ The process gained steam this week with an informal straw poll in the Security Council.² The details of the “blind” straw poll reveal very little about how much support each of the current candidates really have. Instead, it was merely a way for candidates to learn which of the 15 Security Council members “encourage” them to go on, “discourage” them, or have “no opinion.” While two candidates received more support than the other two, confidence in the currently announced candidates is low and speculation is high that others will be nominated over the next few months. It is unlikely that this week’s straw poll will determine how the race will shape up. The most significant result may be for a candidate or two to withdraw quietly after being discouraged by the Security Council.

However, the straw poll is an opportunity for Security Council members to send a message about what they would like to see from the next Secretary-General. The United States should use this process to state clearly that candidates for Secretary-General must be committed to fundamental and far-reaching UN reform to make the organization more transparent, accountable, and effective.

The Next Secretary-General?

Politics makes strange bedfellows, and this is

perhaps more true for the United Nations than elsewhere. The most overt evidence of political horse-trading involves the regional influence over the selection of the Secretary-General. In tacit acknowledgement of Asia’s claim to the next Secretary-General, all four of the official candidates are Asian. Asia’s claim is based on an informal and loosely followed tradition of rotating the Secretary-General position among different regions.³ Thus far, candidates from countries outside of the Asian regional group have been excluded from consideration, despite the fact that Eastern Europe is the only regional group that has never had a Secretary-General.

Politics also likely dominated, if less publicly, consideration of the four official candidates by the Security Council this week. All have been jetting around the world on public relations tours to secure high-level official endorsements, and all have personal strengths and weaknesses that will factor into the support they garner. Just as important, however, are international political dynamics and the concerns of the members of the Security Council. All four of the official can-

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didates have widely reported negatives that may undermine support in the Security Council:

- **India: Shashi Tharoor, UN Undersecretary-General for Communications.** While Tharoor has made the promotion of human rights and non-governmental organization (NGOs) participation in the UN the centerpieces of his campaign, he has been endorsed by Belarus—one of the world's worst human rights abusers and a country that often intimidates its own NGOs.⁴ Tharoor argues that his years of experience within the UN will greatly aid him as Secretary-General. Others argue that an insider would be poorly positioned to reform the UN and point to numerous scandals during the tenure of long-time UN bureaucrat and current Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Tharoor has not won the endorsement of any of the major world leaders lobbied by his government at the recent G-8 ministerial.
- **South Korea: Ban Ki-Moon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade.** Ban Ki-Moon has the support of at least two consistent human rights abusers—Uzbekistan and Egypt—which raises questions about his commitment to making the UN more effective in advancing basic human rights.⁵ While his familiarity with North Korea may be an asset, that the South Korean government has been reluctant to confront North Korea on human rights or its belligerence and nuclear ambitions should concern the U.S. because the situation on the peninsula will likely occupy the UN for the foreseeable future. Ban has said little about UN reform, and there are questions about his commitment to it. The current government in South Korea campaigned in 2004 with strong anti-United States rhetoric. Thus support from the U.S. is in question even though President Bush said the U.S. is now “looking in the Far East” for the next Secretary-General.⁶
- **Sri Lanka: Jayantha Dhanapala.** Jayantha Dhanapala failed to win India's support, which is considered important for a South Asian candidate. He has been strongly criticized by Russia and was reportedly a thorn in America's side as chair of a global review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. As UN Undersecretary-General for Disarmament from 1998 to 2003, Dhanapala reestablished and led the UN's disarmament program. Under his watch, India and Pakistan declared themselves to be nuclear states, and Iran and North Korea violated their nuclear arms agreements.
- **Thailand: Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart Sathirathai.** Surakiart Sathirathai was the early frontrunner, based on his endorsement by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). He reportedly also has Chinese support. However, his prospects seem to be in

1. “Communication of the President of the Security Council to the President of the General Assembly regarding the selection of the next Secretary-General,” from UNSGselection.org, circulated on July 6, 2006, at http://www.unsgselection.org/files/SCPres_LetteronSGappointment_6Jul06.pdf.
2. “Ballot to Size Up Successor to Annan,” *Financial Times*, July 22, 2006.
3. Past Secretaries-General have included three from the Western Europe and Others group, two from the African group, and one each from the Asian and the Latin American and the Caribbean groups. In order, the past and current UN Secretaries-General are: Trygve Lie (Norway), 1946-1952; Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden), 1953-1961; U Thant (Myanmar), 1961-1971; Kurt Waldheim (Austria), 1972-1981; Javier Perez de Cuellar (Peru), 1982-1991; Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt), 1992-1996; and Kofi Annan (Ghana), 1997-2006.
4. According to the U.S. Department of State, “The government's human rights record remained very poor and worsened in some areas with the government continuing to commit numerous serious abuses.” Specifically, the State department noted a government predilection toward “deregistration and harassment of nongovernmental organizations.” See “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2005,” Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, March 8, 2006, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61638.htm>.
5. Arirang News, “Uzbek President Backs Korean FM's UN Candidacy,” *The Chosun Ilbo & Digital Chosun Ilbo*, at <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200603/200603300015.html>.
6. Shaveta Bansal, “Bush Says Next UN Leader May Be From Asia,” All Headline News, July 11, 2006.

steady decline as his government battles political troubles in Thailand. He has reacted to detractors by filing lawsuits, and many human rights groups oppose him.⁷

News reports indicate that, while Ban Ki-Moon and Shashi Tharoor led the UN Security Council's first straw poll to become the next Secretary-General, there is a "a general sense that none of the candidates were likely to succeed."⁸

If the official candidates founder, other potential candidates include Afghanistan's former finance minister Ashraf Ghani; Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan; President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia; former deputy prime minister and finance minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim; current high commissioner of Pakistan to the United Kingdom and a former ambassador to the United States Maleeha Lodhi; former President of Poland Aleksander Kwasniewski; Singapore's former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong; and Administrator of the UN Development Programme Kemal Dervis of Turkey.

U.S. Priorities for the Next Secretary-General

How the U.S. will vote on the official candidates is unclear. Although President Bush's statements on

July 10 indicate that the U.S. has acknowledged demands that the next Secretary-General be from Asia, it also seems clear that the U.S. will oppose candidates whom it considers unsuitable.⁹ Thus far, the U.S. appears unenthused about any of the four declared candidates, which may in part reflect its uncertainty about the commitment of the individual candidates to fundamental UN reform. Based on comments by U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton, UN reform is a priority for the U.S. and will be a key factor in its decision whether to support or oppose a particular candidate.¹⁰

The organization has major responsibilities. The UN employs over 9,000 people of all nationalities and spends \$7 billion per year in the its regular and peacekeeping budgets—more than the 2004 gross domestic product of 72 UN member states.¹¹ It runs 18 peacekeeping missions involving some 90,000 personnel.¹² Some of these missions, including the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) established in Jerusalem in 1948 and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) established in 1949, date back decades and are older than two-thirds of UN member states.

Unfortunately, the UN has often failed in these responsibilities, and recent, well-publicized scan-

7. Daniel Ten Kate "Rumors: the weapons of mass destabilization," *ThaiDay*, July 19, 2006, at <http://www.manager.co.th/IHT/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=949000092444>.
8. Mark Turner, "Korean tops straw poll to head UN," *Financial Times*, July 25 2006, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/f04f40d6-1b88-11db-b164-0000779e2340.html>.
9. Shaveta Bansal, "Bush Says Next UN Leader May Be From Asia," All Headline News, July 11, 2006, at <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7004182038>.
10. Ambassador Bolton said, "We need a strong Secretary-General to help reform the U.N. and we're very much involved in that selection." Interview on Fox News, July 22, 2006. Bolton also stated on NPR, "We want somebody who will be the chief administrative officer. I've described the ideal candidate as a proletarian - somebody who will work in the system, who will get his fingernails dirty or her fingernails dirty, and really manage the place, which is what it needs." Interview on NPR with Michele Keleman, NPR News, Washington, DC, July 24, 2006.
11. The General Assembly approved the \$3.8 billion biennial regular budget in December 2005, which includes a 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 <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/ga10442.doc.htm>. UN peacekeeping costs were about \$5 billion in the last fiscal year ending on June 30, 2006. *United Nations Peacekeeping: Meeting New Challenges*, United Nations, at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q9.htm>. GDP data from World Bank Development Indicators online.
12. "United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations Fact Sheet," United Nations, at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf>.

dals 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. 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.¹³

The United Nations often makes decisions based more on political concerns than on the overall effectiveness of the organization.¹⁴ Seemingly benign changes in personnel and mandates are perceived as turf wars, slights, or assaults on obscure fiefdoms. These concerns led the G-77 to delay and block Secretary-General Annan's reform effort by requesting a series of reports from the Secretary-General on his proposals.¹⁵ Compounding the problem, the G-77 led an effort to approve a UN budget beyond the \$950 million cap despite making little progress on UN reform this past June, thus removing a major incentive for reform. While the U.S. did not vote against the resolution, it disassociated itself from the consensus position.¹⁶

The United States should make UN reform a paramount consideration for the next Secretary-General. President Bush missed an important opportunity recently when he left the drive for reform out of the list of qualities he seeks in the next Secretary-General. The next Secretary-General should, as the President pointed out, be someone who "wants to spread liberty and enhance the peace, do difficult things like con-

front tyranny, worry about the human condition, [and] blow the whistle on human rights violations,"¹⁷ but it is also critical that he or she is committed to battling fraud, improving UN oversight, and removing the bureaucratic detritus and defects that limit the UN's effectiveness.

The official candidates have presented their views on reform to the Security Council. Yet UN reform for these candidates may be inconsistent with what the U.S. envisions. To varying degrees, they have engaged in political maneuvering designed to attract support from a broad swath of the General Assembly and avoid controversial aspects of reform.

The failure of these candidates to lay out explicitly a reform agenda designed to improve UN effectiveness, oversight, and accountability and to forthrightly announce their intention to implement those reforms if they become Secretary-General should concern the U.S. Whoever takes over from Kofi Annan must be more than the chief cheerleader for the UN, an opportunistic diplomat, or a skillful orator. As John Bolton has noted,

The UN Charter describes the secretary-general as the UN's "chief administrative officer." He is not the president of the world. He is not a diplomat for all seasons... He is the chief administrative officer. Nothing less than that, to be sure, but, with even greater certainty, nothing more.¹⁸

13. 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 <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm913.cfm>. 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 <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl868.cfm>. 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 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/269/62/PDF/N0626962.pdf>.

14. "Annan Succession Pits Big Powers Against Developing Nations," Bloomberg News, June 22, 2006.

15. For a discussion of the UN reform effort and analysis of the internal political dynamics, see Brett D. Schaefer, "A Progress Report on U.N. Reform," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1937, May 19, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1937.cfm>.

16. "Statement by John R. Bolton, Permanent U.S. Representative to the United Nations In Explanation of Position On Program budget for the biennium 2006-2007 Document A/C.5/60/L.44," USUN Press Release #140 (06), June 28, 2006, at http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/06_140.htm.

17. "First straw poll on U.N. secretary-general post expected in late July," *The Korea Herald*, July 13, 2006.

As much as individuals, groups, and governments are eager to see the next Secretary-General champion various causes, the first priority and qualification for the next Secretary-General—and the only responsibility specifically assigned to the office in the UN Charter—is to be an effective chief administrative officer.¹⁹ Given the evident flaws of the organization, the first priority of a chief administrative officer must be to fight for fundamental reform of the organization.

Without reform to improve effectiveness and accountability, every UN activity—regardless of its merits or the capabilities of the next Secretary-General—will suffer. Unfortunately, the straw poll process will say little about how much emphasis the Council places on a candidate's ability to carry out substantive UN reform. It won't indicate what substantive expertise the Security Council members

seek in the person who will inherit from Kofi Annan a massive and very troubled organization. The U.S. should request that the candidates publicly identify a reform agenda that they will pursue and should announce that a lack of commitment to reform will draw U.S. opposition. In addition, Washington should make it clear that failure to follow through on promises made by the eventual winner will influence the U.S. decision to support or oppose reelection five years hence.

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18. John R. Bolton, "The Creation, Fall, Rise, and Fall of the United Nations," chapter 3 in Ted Galen Carpenter, ed., *Delusions of Grandeur: The United Nations and Global Intervention* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1997), at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/books/bolton-chapter.pdf>.

19. UN Security Council Report, "Second Report on the Appointment of the UN Secretary-General," June 21, 2006, citing the UN Preparatory Commission Report #PC/20, December 23, 1945, pp. 3-4. The order of priorities are: "Administrative and executive qualities to integrate the activity of the whole complex of UN organ (para 12). Leadership qualities to determine the character and efficiency of the Secretariat (para 15). Skills to lead a team from many different countries and build the necessary team spirit (para 15). Moral authority to model the independent role required by Article 100 of the UN Charter (para 15). Ability to play a role as a mediator (para 16). Capacity to act as an informal adviser or confidant to many governments (para 16, 19). The highest qualities of political judgment, tact and integrity... (para 16). Communications and representation skills to represent the UN to the public at large... (para 17). Overall qualities which demonstrate to the world at large that personally the candidate 'embodies the principles and ideals of the Charter to which the Organization seeks to give effect' (para 17)."