CONSIDERING THE MULTIPLE AND PRESSING CHALLENGES THE UNITED NATIONS FACES TODAY, WHAT IS THE PROPER ROLE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AS TOP INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SERVANT?

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Abstract

As the successor of the failed League of Nations, the United Nations was established at the end of World War II to ensure International Peace and Security; and promote Human Rights and Development amongst other imperatives. The UN is headed by a Secretary-General who supervises the operations of the International Organization. There has been a significant correlation between the qualities and roles of each UN Secretary-General and achieving these UN Core. The disorderly state of the International System and the actuality that states are driven by their national interests make this job one of the most difficult on earth. This paper critically examines the requisite role of the UN Secretary-General in addressing United Nations' pressing internal and external challenges. Despite the challenges and failures of the UN since 1945, significant achievements have been made especially in the areas of Human Rights Promotion, Refugees Management, Gender Equality, Peacekeeping, Poverty Eradication, Trade Liberalization, Securing Debt Relief, Facilitating Transitional Justice, Conflict Mediation, Combating Diseases and Managing the Effects and Adaptation of Climate Change. The UN Secretaries-General have played greater roles in the progress made in these areas through shaping the Global Agenda and constantly hammering on and lobbying the world about assorted

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key concerns. Through their roles many Treaties, Protocols and Institutions have been established to address various global concerns. The qualities and roles of UN Secretaries-General since 1945 were critically analyzed, bringing out the correlation between these qualities and roles, and their achievements – overall achievements of the UN. The frustrations of UN Secretaries-General especially those necessitated by the UN Security Council’s internal politics were also brought to light. The needful qualities and qualifications of a UN Secretary-General were critically highlighted, dissected, pairing them with past successes and failures. Some of these qualities range from qualities of Resilience, Moral Courage, and the personality to coax the most powerful world leaders towards an agreement, Impartiality, Persuasive Powers and Charm, to Wisdom. This work is segmented into the Cold War and Post-Cold War Eras Secretaries-General, the UN Challenges and the achievements and failures of these UN Chiefs. Finally, is the analysis of the present challenges of the UN and what are required of the coming UN Secretary-General in addressing them, as Ban leaves next year.

1. Introduction – The UN and Roles of Secretaries-General

The United Nations (UN) is an International Organization, designed to promote international peace, security, development, human rights; protect the environment; and provide humanitarian aid in times of cataclysms. Established in 1945, after World War II, the UN replaced the bootless League of Nations in order to prevent another such conflict. The UN, headquartered in New York, currently has 193 member states; and six principal organs: the General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council (UNSC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the United Nations Trusteeship Council. The UN System agencies include the World Food Programme, the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank Group, the World Health Organization etc. The UN won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001, and some of its officers and agencies have also been awarded the prize.

The UN Secretary-General (UNSG) is perceptively the most difficult position on earth because of the pressures from member states, the unending divisions amongst major powers in the UNSC, and the relentless intellectual and physical demands. Because of the open-ended nature of the role of the UNSG, each of them interprets the role differently. The UNSG heads the UN Secretariat as a top diplomat; and is also the spokesperson of the organization. Article 97 of Chapter XV of the UN Charter asserts that the Secretary-General shall be the "Chief Administrative Officer" of the UN, but does not characterize their specific roles. Ideas about the roles of the UN Chief are further stated in Articles 98 through 100, as the officer in all meetings of the six principal organs except the ICJ, and shall perform other functions obligated to him by these organs. According to Article 99, the UNSG is responsible of notifying the UNSC on matters which "in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and 

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security;” 2 and could work behind the scenes to facilitate discussions if the members of the council are unwilling to discuss such matters. Since 1945, the UN has had 8 Secretaries-General: Trygvie Lie, Dag Hammarskjold, U Thant, Kurt Waldheim, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Boutros Boutros Ghali, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon (the current). These men have spoken out and played important roles on global issues to various degrees. 3 The UNSG must also "uphold the values and moral authority of the UN, and speak and act for peace, even at the risk, from time to time, of challenging or disagreeing with those same Member States." 4

The assets of the UNSG include his personal diplomatic skill, his staff, and the centrality of the UN in International Diplomacy. A UNSG should have outstanding conflict prevention, negotiation, mediation and resolution skills especially on polarized International Issues; should have a deep exposure to International Relations Issues; and should have been outstanding in an important national, regional or international leadership capacity. The UNSG should also have the authority and personality to wheedle the most powerful world leaders towards a consensus. Furthermore, the UNSG is supposed to be independent, impartial and must have integrity. These are necessary to prevent international disputes from arising, going apocalyptic or spreading. The UNSG also attends consultations with world leaders, government officials, and others; and travels worldwide in other to be in touch with the populations of the Organization's Member States and inform them about the vast array of issues of international concern that are on the Organization's agenda. 5 Every year, the UNSG issues a report on the work of the UN that appraises its activities and outlines future priorities. 6 Additionally, Secretaries-General serve for renewable five-year terms and their recommendation is subject to the veto of any of the five permanent Members of the UNSC. The UNSG’s selection process customary norms include the rotation of the position within five regions of the world, and that the position holder may not be a citizen of any of the Security Council's five permanent members. 7 Most Secretaries-General have been agreeable candidates from middle powers with no little prior fame.

2. During Cold War

The UN mission to preserve world peace and subsequently its effectiveness were deeply questioned in its early decades by the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union and their

2 UN Charter, Article 99
3 Simon Chesterman (ed), Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
4 “Role of the Secretary-General”, The United Nations Website
5 http://www.un.org/sg/sg_role.shtml
6 Ibid
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respective allies. Because of this, the hands of Secretaries-General within this period were tied and they could not achieve so much despite their remarkable personalities, qualifications and outstanding diplomatic skills. During this era, the UN role in International Relations wasn’t quite clear and was deeply undermined by the power politics of the West and East. There were so many proxy wars within this era, and UN role in preserving international security was an abysmal to the extent that another World War was almost kicked off. During this era, UN was able to intervene in conflicts distant from the Cold War.8 Between 1946 and 1952, Trygve Lie was the UNSG. He came to the position with outstanding mediation and diplomatic skills, and qualifications (former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs etc). He was instrumental in the intervention of UN Armed Forces in the Korean War which resulted in the subsequent refusal of the Soviet Union to recognize him as the Secretary-General. He also supported and influenced the establishment of UN Armed Forces in the Korean War which resulted in the subsequent refusal of the Soviet Union to recognize him as the Secretary-General. He also supported and influenced the establishment of Israel in 1947 following Palestine’s partition; and Indonesia. His passionate support and bias for Israel made him pass secret military and diplomatic information to Israeli officials which were very shameful to the position.9 Nevertheless, he influenced the withdrawal of Soviet forces in Iran and a ceasefire to the fighting in Kashmir. His critics point out his failures to facilitate negotiation in the Berlin Blockade and have criticized him for his arrogance and stubbornness – very pejorative qualities for the position. He would end up presiding over a long list of diplomatic failures, tarnishing the UN image, and accomplishing very little.10 Trygve Lie subsequently called the job “the most difficult job in the world” a phrase iterated by most of his seven successors; and he resigned.

With great diplomatic skill, qualifications, technocratic competence and moral authority, Dag Hammarskjöld became the UNSG between 1953 and 1961 and helped in mediating the Suez Canal Dispute (1956) after the first UN Peacekeeping Force was established to end the Suez Crisis. He was often praised as one of the UN most effective Secretaries-General and made the position at 47. However, the UN under his leadership failed to intervene against the USSR’s simultaneous invasion of Hungary following the country’s revolution.11 His resilience made him to refuse to give in to Soviet pressure to resign. He was responsible for organizing of the first and second UN international conference on the peaceful uses of atomic energy in Geneva (1955 and 1958). Under him, new methodologies were implemented at the UN, including the establishment of a UN “presence” in various conflicts around the world. In 1960, the UN deployed United Nations Operation in the Congo (UNOC), to bring order to the Congo crisis.12 While travelling to meet with rebel leader Moise Tshombe during the conflict, he died in a plane crash; months

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12 Ibid, pp. 115–134
later he was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. US President John F. Kennedy called Hammarskjöld "the greatest statesman of our century".13

U Thant succeeded Dag, and was the UNSG from 1961 – 1971 as a top diplomat. In 1964, he deployed the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus - the longest-running peacekeeping mission. He helped to diffuse the Cuban Missile Crisis and in ending the Civil War in the Congo. He influenced the establishment of the UN Development Programme, UN University, UNCTAD, UNITAR, and the UN Environmental Programme. From 1972 to 1981, Kurt Waldiem was the UNSG and came to the position as an outstanding diplomat and former Ambassador of Austria. During his first three years, he visited areas of special concern to the United Nations including South Africa, Namibia, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. In 1980, he unsuccessfully failed to negotiate the release of the American hostages held in Tehran.14 Javier Perez de Cuellar (1982 – 1991) came to the position as a top diplomat and mediator. He led mediations between Britain and Argentina in the aftermath of the Falklands War. He helped in promoting the efforts of the Contadora Group to bring peace and stability to Central America. He also interceded in the negotiations for the independence of Namibia and the conflict in Western Sahara between Morocco and the Polisario Front. In 1986, he presided over an international arbitration committee that ruled on the Rainbow Warrior incident between New Zealand and France. Under him, the UN shifted its pre-occupation to economic development and cultural exchange.15 Javier Perez de Cuellar also facilitated a negotiation of a ceasefire to end the Iraq-Iran War.

3. Post Cold War

Post Cold War, UN roles in the world have increasingly been around: promoting Democracy, Good Governance, Human Rights, Transparency and Accountability - Civil Society and Media Liberties all around the world - Liberalizing International Trade and Increasing Private Sector Participation in National, Regional and International Economies – Securing Debt Relief and Giving Foreign Aid to her developing members through her institutions - Humanitarian Interventions to prevent gross Human Rights Abuses - Collective Security Efforts - Combating Terrorism - Peacekeeping - Refugees Management - Non-Proliferation - and Mediation in Wars – Fighting Poverty, Inequality and Diseases and Mainstreaming Gender Equality – Combating Climate Change. To address all these, Post Cold War Secretaries-General have helped in influencing mild achievements in most of these. The UN institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC), United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); World Trade Organization

14 Israeli-Ugandan Relations in the Time of Idi Amin by Arye Oded, Jewish Political Studies Review 18:3-4 (Fall 2006)
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(WTO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) - Global Policies and Treaties like the Kyoto Protocol, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and Principles like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – were all established to address a lot of global challenges through mainly the leaderships of UN Secretaries-General. Boutros Boutros Ghali of Egypt became the UNSG in 1992 and was there till 1996. He made the position after being the Foreign Affairs Minister of Egypt and as a scholar of International Law and Affairs. During his time, he focused on the Middle East, the bureaucratic reorganization of the UN Secretariat and the increasing economic gap between North and South. UN also failed in Srebrenica (the massacre) and in Rwandan (the genocide) while he was the UNSG. In 1992, he submitted An Agenda for Peace, a suggestion for how the UN could respond to violent conflict. Subsequently, he could not muster support in the UN for intervention in the continuing Angolan Civil War. Some scholars believed he was responsible for an escalation of the Somalia crisis. His reputation became mixed in the larger controversies over the role of the United States in the UN.

The United States would subsequently veto a second term for Boutros-Ghali and he was not re-appointed. This brought in the ability of a UNSG to be in good terms with the US as a major quality for the position as Secretaries-General work more closely with the US than any other UNSC Member State, and needs relationships with both government officials as well as Members of Congress who play an enormous role over UN funding issues. His successor Kofi Annan (1997 - 2006) through advocacy; beautiful diplomatic and managerial skills; persuasive powers and charm; wisdom, practical intelligence and charisma; moral authority; and having being with the organization ended up as one of the best Secretaries-General ever. He helped in reshaping the image of the UN, in raising UN reputation and in integrating the Civil Society and Private Sector into UN works. He represented the clear qualities of an efficient Secretary-General in leading the UN amidst all global challenges. He shared a Nobel Peace Prize with the UN for his efforts in revitalizing the United Nations in 2000. On assuming office, he introduced new management mechanisms through the establishment of a cabinet-style body to assist him and be grouping the UN activities. He introduced the establishment of the position of Deputy Secretary-General, a 10 percent reduction in posts, and a reduction in administrative costs. Annan was deeply involved in supporting the transition from military to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1998. In 1999, he supported the efforts of East Timor to secure independence from Indonesia. In 2000, he was responsible for certifying Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon. In 2006, he led talks in New York between the Cameroonian and Nigerian presidents which led to a settlement of the dispute between the two countries over the Bakassi peninsula.

He came in during the escalation of the AIDS epidemic and issued a “Call to Action” proposing the establishment of a Global AIDS and Health Fund. He influenced the shaping of UN Agenda towards respect for human rights leading to the establishment of UNHRC, democracy, equality and poverty reduction. He released We the People: the Role of the UN in the 21st Century, a report that was geared towards improving the lives of the poor in the new millennium which led to the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDGs had 8 goals that were geared toward reducing hunger, poverty, child mortality, and
increasing literacy level. He achieved his streamlining the UN Agenda through influencing the float of UN Offices in every of its member state. He also facilitated the repatriation of more than 900 international civil servants and citizens of Western countries from Iraq and led the first United Nations team negotiating with Iraq on the sale of oil to fund purchases of humanitarian aid. His moral courage made him to challenge the whole international community through his General Assembly speech in 1999 to confront the challenges of genocide, atrocity crimes, and humanitarian intervention which led to the institution of R2P. Later on during US Invasion in Iraq, he called the Invasion illegal based on International Law. He clearly rejected Unilateralism and that Use of Force must be through UNSC resolution. As a visionary Kofi Annan set a lot of Global Agendas and established clear priorities. Annan's oratorical brilliance and advocacies made the organization seem slightly less depressing than it otherwise would have in its darkest hours. Annan was also considered an activist, “world moderator” – style Secretary-General.

4. Current Challenges of the UN and the UNSG’s Efforts

Currently, the UN pressing challenges range from the internal ones of lack of Democracy in the UNSC Permanent Membership and Reforming the Organization for efficiency and pro-activity TO the external ones of Achieving the SGDs as the MDGs were mildly achieved - the Syrian Crisis - Combating Terrorism – the Ukrainian Crisis - the Israeli and Palestinian Crisis - Refugees Crisis - Unilateralism – Global Economic Imbalance - Nuclear Proliferation – the Unending Crisis in the Middle East and North America – Poverty - the Reinstitution of Arms Race amongst the super powers – and Climate change.

On entering office in 2007, the current UNSG, Ban Ki-moon refused to condemn the death penalty imposed on Saddam Hussein by the Iraqi High Tribunal. This position contradicted the long-standing UN opposition to the death penalty as a human-rights concern.16 He has received strong criticism from the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which affirmed that the Secretariat under his leadership was "drifting into irrelevance".17 On entering office, Ban identified global warming as one of the major issues of his administration. On 1 March 2007 in a speech before the UNGA, Ban emphasized his concerns about global warming. In 2008, he criticized Israel for planning to build housing units in a West Bank settlement, saying the decision conflicts with "Israel's obligation under the road map" for Middle East peace.18 In 2011 when the Libyan Civil War began, Ban’s attention and public statements that year were dominated by the War. He lobbied for peaceful solutions to the crisis. He spoke out against

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military action in Libya, believing that a diplomatic solution would be possible and preferable. However, he gave up that if the then leader Muammar Gaddafi refused to abide by a cease fire agreement, the international coalition of military forces would have no choice but to intervene to protect the civilian population in Libya.19 After his re-appointment for his second term in January 2012, Ban has focused his public statements and speeches on peace and equality in the Middle East and on equality issues. Throughout 2012, he expressed his concern about the continuing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in particular the condition of the Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli prisons20 and the movement restrictions imposed on Gaza Strip residents.21 During a speech at the UN headquarters commemorating Human Rights Day, Ban condemned countries with anti-gay laws, mentioning 76 countries that criminalize homosexuality. On Syria, Ban has been organizing and moderating the Geneva II Conference.22 Ban’s challenges and failures have been the issues of increasing terrorism practices, the UN failure in Syria and Ukraine; and the inability of the UN under his leadership to effectively respond to the Refugees Crisis and instabilities (products of US’s Unilateralism and imposing their norms on other states) in the Middle East.

5. Post Ban’s Leadership and the Necessaries of The Next UNSG

As Ban Ki-moon leaves next year and in addressing the UN internal and external pressing challenges above, the next UNSG must have the qualities of Resilience - Moral Courage - Practical Intelligence - Diplomatic, Mediation and Managerial Skills - A deep exposure to International Relations Issues – The authority and personality to coax the most powerful world leaders towards an agreement – Independence - Impartiality - Integrity - Qualifications for the job (should have shown exemplary leadership through measurable high capacity leadership performances) - Technocratic Competence - Persuasive powers and Charm – Wisdom – Charisma – should be Unbiased – and should be a Visionary. With most of these qualities, the UNSG can play the roles of addressing the current global challenges through: being able to shape the UN Agenda – Bringing Issues to focus and Clarity – Mediate and Arbitrate to prevent conflicts or bring an end to them – Check the high-handedness of Super Powers - and bringing to the attention of UNSC, any issue that is a threat to International Security.

6. Conclusion

Preoccupations of Secretaries-General during the Cold War were mainly decolonization and conflict resolution. And previous UN Chiefs through their mediation skills played enormous roles. Previous Secretaries-General have ran the UN through identifying global problems, forming a technical team to discuss them, coming up with Treaties or Agreements to make them part of International Law, setting up Institutions for implementation and supervising the implementation. Through their efforts as the face of the UN especially since the end of the Cold War, there have been more institutional mechanisms in addressing global challenges like: poverty, hunger, illiteracy, diseases, Climate change, gross human rights abuses, militarization, and terrorism. The needfulness of the UN in managing Global Challenges is increasingly quite important and the UN effectiveness in doing this has great correlation with the personalities and roles of its Secretaries-General. The UN internal challenges in this New World Order also include Unilateralism of super powers and their inability to come to consensus when they are needed most like the current example of Syria – This is where the role of the UNSG is highly needed. The veto power system of the UNSC has rendered UN powerless in very important interventions to save human lives from atrocities and in making very important decisions and this has really incapacitated the UNSG. To make UN stronger and be able respond to this world’s current security and socio-economic realities, the UNSC’s permanent membership structure has to be changed to reflect the current power structure of the world. This will also help to increase the efficiency of the UNSG.

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