

Over to you, Ban Ki Moon

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BERLIN: It must have dawned on Ban Ki Moon, the South Korean foreign minister who has all but sealed his election as secretary general of the United Nations, that in fact he is getting three jobs: the world's top diplomat, CEO of the world's most important and most troubled international bureaucracy, and secular pope entrusted to preach and protect the values of the UN Charter.

His ability to combine and balance these roles and responsibilities will determine his legacy.

The incoming secretary general will do well to learn from the experience of his predecessor. Kofi Annan paid dearly for neglecting the mundane tasks of leading and reforming the UN Secretariat.

The lesson should be clear: While advancing the UN's work on peace and security, human rights and sustainable development, Ban should never lose sight of his daily responsibility to revitalize the ailing UN Secretariat.

Critics are already busily questioning whether the soft-spoken South Korean foreign minister is up to the job. But commentators portraying him as "colorless," "underwhelming" and without ideas could not be further off the mark.

Forty years of public service and leadership in a country that has managed to progress from a poor dictatorship to a prosperous democracy; extensive diplomatic experience in dealing with one of the world's most dangerous conflicts, as well as the skills deepened in a mid-career program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government are crucial assets that Ban can build on in his new job.

In the race for secretary general, Ban ran a skilful campaign in which he advocated the right approach for turning the UN into an effective, accountable and transparent global organization.

He promised to reform the "culture of the organization, increase accountability and toughen ethics." He called on member states to allow the Secretariat "greater flexibility matched by greater accountability."

His characterization of the U.S.-UN love-hate relationship was as simple as it was to the point: "Global challenges call for global responses. The United States cannot do it alone. The United States needs the United Nations, and vice versa."

Ban's challenge now is to use the next three months for an effective transition. He should waste no time enlisting a deputy with expanded areas of authority. At the same time, he should announce that all senior appointments will be based on an open and meritocratic search true to

the almost forgotten ideals of international public service.

He should also push for the UN's notoriously fragmented development work to become more coherent and effective by adopting "Four Ones": a single program, a single budget, a single evaluation and monitoring framework, and a single, fully empowered resident coordinator for each country.

Ban is right on target when he asserts that the "strategic focus should be more on achieving the goals already set rather than identifying new frontiers to conquer." In this spirit, he should confront all those who want to put the Millennium Development Goals back into the drawer rather than making them the cornerstone of the UN's efforts in the coming decade.

In this, Ban should continue Annan's successful policy of enlisting the support of business and civil society to promote sustainable development.

He should lobby for strengthening the strategic and operational capacity of the UN's overstretched peacebuilding apparatus. With the same vigor as his predecessor, he should use the moral pulpit of his office to confront extremism, stand up for human rights and urge action against genocide and humanitarian emergencies.

Most of all he should make one thing clear: That for the success of the organization it is of pivotal importance for the United States, other Western powers and developing countries to cease their destructive new cold war within the United Nations.

Whenever member states get carried away wrangling over power, prestige and pork, Ban should remind them that the UN Charter starts with "We the peoples," not "We the parochial power holders."

And member states should give the new secretary general a fair chance to prove right his credo that "the best days for our global organization have yet to come."

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