

Divided We Stand: Ban Ki Moon and the United Nations. Monocle, June 2008.

The eighth secretary-general of the United Nations is desperate to be remembered as a success. But Ban Ki-moon, a former South Korean minister of trade and foreign affairs, is faltering both inside the organisation and globally. Since he took office in January 2007, Ban has brought the Secretariat – the permanent officials – to the brink of bureaucratic civil war. Morale is collapsing, veteran officials are resigning or being sacked and the organisation's most important department, peacekeeping, has been needlessly split into two.

Globally, Ban has allowed the United Nations to be further sidelined on international peace and security issues and infuriates the developing world by cosyng up to the Bush administration. More, his failure to meaningfully confront the perpetrators of the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the ongoing genocide in Darfur, carried out by Sudan, is a gross abnegation of his moral responsibility.

There are two Ban Ki-moons. The first is an emollient diplomat, especially when dealing with the powerful permanent five members of the Security Council: Britain, the US, France, Russia and China. Conciliation, not confrontation is the order of the day. "These are the dog days of the Bush administration and a good time to assert the value of multilateralism. But Ban's pronouncements are banal, careful and unexciting," says a western diplomat with lengthy experience of the United Nations.

The second Ban, the boss of the Secretariat, is closeted, hierarchical and authoritarian. "In the field you know who your enemies are, and they are external. But here they are internal," says one UN source. "Ban's people do not listen, they do not take advice, they are extremely secretive, decisions are being taken on faulty homework and lack of knowledge," says another UN official. "Morale is at the lowest point I've known, from the lift man to the department heads. The root of the problem is unclear management, and no command of substance. There is a culture clash between the Korean way and the way the UN works, which is very multicultural and more consensual, which you need where you have people from all five continents."

Ban set out his credo in his inaugural address in December 2006. A new regime was coming. After politely praising Annan, Ban warned: "One of my core tasks will be to breathe new life and inject new confidence into the sometimes weary Secretariat... Member states need a dynamic and courageous Secretariat, not one that is passive and risk averse."

The speech caused anger and consternation among UN officials, and still echoes today. And the struggle for the Secretariat is about more than bureaucratic empire building. UN officials write reports and briefings that influence the decisions taken by the Security Council, which have the force of international law. The UN could shape the world's response to everything from climate change and food shortages to nuclear proliferation and the future of

the Middle East.

Ban quickly surrounded himself with fellow countrymen. The second most powerful man in the United Nations is Kim Won-soo, a former South Korean Foreign Ministry official. Kim is Ban's deputy chef de cabinet (chief of staff), gatekeeper and main political adviser. Kim is so influential that some in the building quip that after talking with him, they have met the secretary-general. But South and North Korea only joined the United Nations in 1991. Ban's Korean praetorian guard was a poor guide through the fractious, unresponsive United Nations machine.

Samir Sanbar, former UN chief of public information, worked with five secretary-generals and now runs unforum.com. "Ban Ki-moon is polite, pleasant, helpful and speaks in a low voice," he says. "His mindset could be excellent, as he has no baggage, he is a tabula rasa. But the first impression was that the tabula was being written on in Korean."

No UN officials will speak on the record, other than to utter anodyne banalities. Even spokespeople demand three levels of attribution: on the record, off the record and as an unnamed department official. That paranoia is not new, but has got worse under Ban, critics claim. "This claim of transparency is completely belied by the way they work. The management decisions seem arbitrary."

The move from South Korea to the chaotic babel of the United Nations was a massive culture shock to Ban. The UN is riven by ongoing inter-departmental struggles for power, between, for example, the realpolitik of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and the idealism of the Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). There are 192 member states, including the powerful G77 bloc of non-aligned and developing countries, who instinctively recoil at any attempt, real or perceived, to shift the United Nations to a pro-American agenda. The Security Council, where real power lies, is split between Britain and the US on one side and China and Russia on the other, while France glides between them. The very architecture of the Secretariat building, a 38-storey 1950s glass covered skyscraper, with its long, narrow corridors, and numerous hidden alcoves encourages intrigue and cabals.

Ban did not choose his first battles wisely. He tried to downgrade the Department of Disarmament Affairs, provoking a furious backlash from the G77. The department chief, Nobuaki Tanaka, left. Eventually Ban settled on renaming it the Office for Disarmament Affairs. He split the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in two, and set up a new Department of Field Support (DFS), to oversee supplies and logistics. The decision caused anger in the DPKO and was seen as unnecessary. The department already has an Office of Operations, dealing with field missions. It is overstretched, running 17 peacekeeping operations around the world and struggling to find troops for Darfur. Its new budget requests have not been met. The new structures with the DFS are understaffed and under-resourced. Vast amounts of staff time and energy have been diverted from running

missions to setting up the DFS. Veteran staff were sidelined. Hédi Annabi, the widely respected Tunisian DPKO deputy chief, was exiled to run the UN mission in Haiti. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the French head of the DPKO, has handed in his notice. Some UN officials whisper that the split was all Washington's idea, as Bush loyalists were angered at the UN's most powerful department being run by a Frenchman.

Ban's defenders argue the system needs shaking up, especially after the oil-for-food scandal that tainted the end of the Annan era. All senior UN officials must post their financial disclosure statements on the UN's internal website. Departmental objectives are also posted. A new ethics code applies to all UN staff. The UN's Procurement Task Force is investigating \$1bn of suspect contracts. "Kofi Annan had a high tolerance of the UN's idiosyncrasies and slowness. Ban wants to see results. He comes from an efficient country. He has no patience for setting up a working group," says an official who works closely with Ban. And relations with the US, which contributes 22 per cent of the organisation's budget, certainly needed to be repaired.

But UN officials complain of unnecessary waits for field appointments to be authorised and a lack of consultation with the relevant UN departments. "A lot of people have been put into leadership positions although they are not knowledgeable about special issues," says another UN official. "You have to have a certain amount of geographic representation, but that does not preclude you from having the right person in the right job. Under Annan there was more consultation."

Long-term UN observers agree. "The single worst aspect to Ban Ki-Moon is his appointments," says James Bone, who has reported on the UN for The Times for 20 years. "He regards them as favours to be distributed among the member states. The worst case is the deputy secretary-general, Asha-Rose Migiro, who was appointed because Ban spent six hours on a plane sitting next to her and she is a black African woman and he needed one. She has had no impact on the organisation and that is how he likes it." Ban's officials disagree, describing Migiro, a former foreign minister of Tanzania, as an experienced and capable woman.

Ban has brought a new work ethic to the UN. Annan usually arrived at the executive suite of offices on the 38th floor of the Secretariat Building at around 9.30am. Ban is at his desk by 8am, often earlier. And Ban's self-effacing, behind the scenes style is a pleasant change, says Bone. "I admire his personal rectitude, he is very hardworking and much more scrupulous than Kofi's people. The United Nations under Ban Ki-moon is not a personality cult. Kofi's allies are furious with him for his house cleaning and are still working to undermine him."

There are times when the UN works. The island of Cyprus is heading for reunification. "That speaks to the fact that we persevered, with a problem that festered for 44 years and set a framework for a solution," says Michael Møller,

who recently retired as UN chief of mission. "The United Nations has an institutional memory, and is seen as an impartial, objective actor. Cyprus is a good example of what the United Nations should be doing and can do, quietly and tenaciously." The UN's institutional memory proved vital when Kofi Annan set up a "shadow UN" in Nairobi during the crisis in Kenya to negotiate a peace deal. Ban authorised the secondment of officials from the Department of Political Affairs.

The UN was founded to protect human rights. Scarred by Rwanda and Bosnia, Annan, towards the end of his term, vocally emphasised human rights. But much of that energy has now dissipated, says a UN human-rights official. "There is much less priority for human rights than under Annan. Ban's people do not give the impression that they are interested in our contribution." Louise Arbour, the high commissioner for human rights, is stepping down this summer after one term in office. But Ban has rightly criticised the new Human Rights Council, which is dominated by Islamic and non-democratic countries, for its obsession with Israel at the expense of other human rights crises.

Darfur activists are critical of Ban's timid response to the ongoing genocide. Hundreds of thousands have died and more than two million been displaced. Eric Reeves, a leading Darfur advocate, says that Ban's response to Darfur has been "disastrous": "He has no strategic vision, and no political courage. Ban has attempted to express intense concern about human suffering and destruction in Darfur, but without a strategy for moving the regime from its obdurate resistance to implementing UN Security resolutions and previous agreements."

Ban himself cannot force peacekeepers to be deployed, or end the conflict. But he has also failed to stand up to the Security Council. After the UN's catastrophic failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica, Kofi Annan commissioned a detailed report on peacekeeping. It made a series of recommendations, probably the most important of which was that the Secretariat must tell the Security Council what it needs to hear about peacekeeping, not what it wants to hear. In short, that before missions are authorised there must be commitments to supply the necessary troops and equipment.

This is not happening. In July 2007 Security Council resolution 1769 mandated the deployment of 26,000 UN peacekeepers and police to Darfur. Only 9,600 have been deployed and Sudan has succeeded in demanding that the majority must be African, knowing full well that African nations lack the capacity to deploy that many effective peacekeepers. "Ban needs to take a stand," says a veteran UN official. "The Security Council is asking for things we cannot do, because we are not getting the resources. Ban needs to tell the council that without the tools the job will not be done."

Ban is also failing to exert his enormous moral authority as secretary-general. A forthright demand that Sudan stop slaughtering civilians and impeding relief supplies would open a space for other human-rights groups,

and help shift the agenda. Steve Crawshaw, UN Advocacy director at Human Rights Watch argues: "Ban Ki-moon's intentions are good but at the same time his eagerness for diplomacy sometimes blinds him to the fact that at certain points the secretary-general's role is to be the voice of moral authority, which can itself help to bring change." Ban's defenders argue that behind the scenes he is much harsher with Sudanese officials.

And while Annan is now canonised as a secular saint, his record is much darker. Two of the UN's most catastrophic failures, the genocide in Rwanda and the massacre at Srebrenica, happened while he was DPKO chief. The UN's own reports catalogue a series of blunders, mismanagement and by DPKO officials. In January 1994 Annan's office twice refused requests from General Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian UN commander in Rwanda, to raid the Hutu arms caches that would later be used in the slaughter of 800,000 Tutsis. In July 1995, as the Bosnian Serbs advanced on Srebrenica, one of six UN-declared "safe areas", much of the DPKO leadership was away, despite intelligence reports of the coming attack, including Annan and Shashi Tharoor, the DPKO team leader on Yugoslavia. So was General Rupert Smith, commander of UN troops in Bosnia. Two days into the attack, on Saturday July 8, Annan, General Smith, and other senior UN officials met in Geneva. Incredibly, they sent General Smith back on leave. Over the next few days up to 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were slaughtered by the Bosnian Serbs. None of this hindered the careers of Annan or his acolytes.

Ban is not the first secretary-general with grand plans to streamline the United Nations. The more important question is whether he wants reform to be able to better carry out the bidding of the great powers on the Security Council, or to defy their national interests and return the organisation to its founding humanitarian ideals. So far Ban prefers compromise over confrontation. He focuses on feel good issues such as hunger, food and climate change, all of which are worthy, but so amorphous, and tied into complex political and economic questions, that they are little more than a useful alibi against the G77's charges of being too close to the Bush administration. The permanent five, who chose Annan's successor, wanted a weak, conciliatory secretary-general and they got one.