

## RESOLVED: UNITING NATIONS IN A DIVIDED WORLD

Written by Ban Ki-Moon

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*The eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon, after serving 10 years retired on January 1, 2018. His memoirs, "Resolved Uniting Nations in A Divided World" were published in 2021. Ban Ki-Moon is the only UN Secretary-General who was born and brought up in a country that not only was a victim of an invasion but also for the first time in the history of the UN, the Organization itself was directly involved in countering the invasion. Ban Ki-moon's memoirs narrates articulately and compassionately many issues that divide the world. The efforts and 'resolve' of the eighth UN Secretary-General to solve, 'resolve' and to improve the human condition (so to speak) is reflected in the optimistic sentiment expressed in the concluding sentence of his book: "[t]ogether our mission is possible."*

### Keywords

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General, George W. Bush, Trygve Lie, Resolved Uniting Nations in A Divided World

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The eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr Ban Ki-moon, after serving 10 years (like four of his predecessors)<sup>1</sup> retired on January 1, 2018. His memoirs-RESOLVED: UNITING NATIONS IN A DIVIDED WORLD-were published in 2021. In early 2022, the United Nations and Ban Ki-moon's successor as Secretary-General Antonio Guterres are facing, among many others, the continuing Covid-19 crisis and the late February 2022 invasion by Russia of Ukraine.

Ban Ki-Moon is the only UN Secretary-General who was born and brought up in a country that not only was a victim of an invasion but also for the first and arguably the only time in the history of the UN, the Organization itself was directly involved in countering the invasion. The UN troops using the United Nations flag fought back the attack against South Korea by North Korea from June 1950 to July 1953 when the Korean War ended with an armistice. As of February 2022 more than 68 years after the signing of the Korean armistice, no fundamental peace regime has been established between the two Koreas.

In a major part of the first Chapter "Early Life: From Tragedy to Strength" Ban Ki-moon writes affectingly of the harrowing experiences as a child, and his parents and family had to go through during the Korean War.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, both as a (South) Korean and as former UN Secretary-General Ban discusses issues pertaining to the Korean peninsula in the Chapter "North Korea: The Difficult Cousins."<sup>3</sup> Even though in a few other issues Ban Ki-moon generally expresses cautious optimism, but, as shown at the sub-title-the "difficult cousins," he writes: "my long experience protects me from irrational optimism ... I do not expect harmony and cooperation on the Korean peninsula for a considerably long time to come."<sup>4</sup>

Of contemporary relevance regarding global health matters is the Chapter "Global Health: Preventing, Containing and Curing Together."<sup>5</sup> Covid-19 was officially announced to be a pandemic around March 12, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Though "Patient Zero" apparently has not been identified vis-à-vis the Covid-19 scourge Ban Ki-Moon's mentions about "Patient Zero" in relation to the 2013 Ebola pandemic. The death toll, according to Ban, in the Ebola pandemic was around 11,300.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See text and notes accompanying note 36 below.

<sup>2</sup> BAN KI-MOON, RESOLVED UNITING NATIONS IN A DIVIDED WORLD 7-14 (Columbia University Press, 2021). The very first sentence of the opening Chapter reads: "I was a child of war but I became a man of peace." See *id.* at 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 73-98.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 98.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 287.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 289.

Nine years later in early 2022 one shudders to think of the death toll and the devastation caused by the global pandemic that is Covid-19. One of the sub-headings in the Chapter is “Lessons Learned, Lessons Forgotten.” Since Ban’s book was published in 2021 Ban mentions the Covid-19 crisis briefly and the United Nations’ role in ameliorating it with the observation that “earlier and more powerful UN strategies could have contained or lessened this pandemic and many others.”<sup>7</sup>

In January 2002 then US President George W. Bush (in)famously stated that the regimes in “Iran, Iraq and North Korea” constituted an “axis of evil.”<sup>8</sup> Almost twenty years later Ban discusses Iran in Part II: Peace and Security under the heading, “The Importance of Promises.”<sup>9</sup> Ban’s implicit statement was that both Iran and the United States under the then Trump administration did not adhere to the promises that have been made. The career diplomat expresses “visible surprise” and is somewhat critical of the fact that former US President Barack Obama and Iran’s supreme leader had “traded letters” especially in the context that the then US government “strongly object[ed]” his “visit to Iran even for an international gathering like the NAM [Non Aligned Movement] Summit.” Ban expresses his disappointment that while objecting his visit to Tehran for the NAM summit the United States administration was “secretly communicating with Tehran behind the scenes.”<sup>10</sup> As a non-diplomat this reviewer is slightly surprised that Ban was “visibly surprised.”

A nuclear North Korean regime and a possible nuclear Iranian regime raise the spectre of the threat and—God forbid—the use of nuclear weapons especially in that both regimes’ nuclear capability cause concerns regionally and globally. While discussing Iran, Ban also mentions North Korea.<sup>11</sup> It is apt that he does (sort of) juxtapose these two regimes since North Korea has conducted nuclear tests and Iran has the potential to do so. Being enmeshed in the “tyranny of the here and the now” (as of March 2022) one hears murmurs (or do they amount to implicit threats) of “nuclear alerts” vis-à-vis Vladimir Putin’s “special military operations” in Ukraine.

Three years after President George W. Bush’s “axis of evil” speech then Secretary of State designate Condoleezza Rice stated that in addition to North Korea and Iran, Burma, Belarus, Cuba and Zimbabwe were “outposts of tyranny.”<sup>12</sup> Chapter 13 of

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 299.

<sup>8</sup> State of the Union Address (Jan. 29, 2002), <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/4540>.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 175.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 178.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 184.

<sup>12</sup> Opening Statement by Condoleezza Rice at the Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate (Jan. 18, 2005), <http://foreignstate.gov/testimony/2005/RiceTestimony050118.pdf>. Then, Condoleezza Rice stated that Saddam Hussein was overthrown by the US’s invasion of Iraq, so that Iraq could be excluded from in the extended list (from ‘axis of evil’) to

Ban Ki-moon's book bears the title, "Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis Opens the Hermit Nation."<sup>13</sup> The hermit nation's then and perhaps to an extent currently "strong man"-at least behind the scenes-is 89-year-old Senior General Than Shwe. Ban Ki-moon states that when he visited Myanmar in May 2008 it was the first visit by a UN Secretary-General in 44 years.<sup>14</sup> Ban states his "deep concern-and immense frustration-at the unacceptably slow response to this grave humanitarian crisis."<sup>15</sup> He also revealed his conversations with Than Shwe after Than Shwe greeted him 'brusquely.'<sup>16</sup>

The latter part of the Chapter is about "The Lady" Aung San Suu Kyi. Ban, while expressing personal admiration to her, was but straight forward when he writes "[t]he Lady's inability or refusal to end the attacks on the Rohingya has disappointed me deeply."<sup>17</sup> As Ban Ki-moon's book was published in June 2021, he was able to add only a five brief paragraphs regarding the aftermath of February 1, 2021 military takeover. Ban writes "Aung San Suu Kyi was at this time<sup>18</sup> under house arrest." But when she was able, she should reclaim her legitimacy by once again standing up for peace and the democratic rule of law.<sup>19</sup>

As far as Burmese/Myanmar affairs are concerned, the reviewer is -justifiably and with compelling reasons one should add-an entrenched or 'incurable' political pessimist. To paraphrase Ban's final sentence from Chapter Six "North Korea; The Difficult Cousins": "I do not expect harmony and cooperation in Burma/Myanmar for a considerably long time to come."<sup>20</sup>

Immediately following the discussion about Myanmar in Chapter Thirteen, Ben writes about Sri Lanka<sup>21</sup> and Haiti<sup>22</sup> in Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen, respectively. Sri Lanka (Ceylon) though not literally a neighbouring country of Burma (Myanmar) shares the (mainly) Buddhist background and has had historical ties. Since the 1980s

"outposts of tyranny."

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 189.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 193. In July 1964 the third Secretary-General of the United Nations the late U Thant visited his native Burma then under strong man General Ne Win. See *Thant Will Make First Visit to Burma in U.N. Office*, N. Y. TIMES, July 2, 1964, at 3. In July 1964, Ban Ki-moon was a 20-year-old University student and the future "strong-man-to-come." Than Shwe was a 31-year-old military officer.

<sup>15</sup> BAN, *supra* note 2 at 193.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 195.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 200.

<sup>18</sup> As of March 2022 she faces a slew of charges the maximum sentences could run to 100 years!

<sup>19</sup> BAN, *supra* note 2 at 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Sri Lanka: Access and Inaction. See BAN, *supra* note 2 at 205.

<sup>22</sup> 'Haiti: From Earth Quake to Heart Break.' *Id.* at 21

Sri Lanka has experienced in Ban's words "the scourge of [civil] war"<sup>23</sup> which indeed was very costly and tragic. Still, in Ceylon/Sri Lanka there were no military coups like in Burma/Myanmar.

Ban's phone conversation with President Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka was perhaps even more discouraging than the in person meeting he had with Burma's dictator Than Shwe. Ban writes Rajapaksa "seemed so agitated by the UN's position that he kept shouting at me as if he were speaking to his subordinates. It was inappropriate and one of my most embarrassing moments with any world leader."<sup>24</sup> In both his Chapters on Myanmar and Sri Lanka Ban ends with a note if not of optimism then at least of hope: "A subsequent generation of young adults will be the most successful in unifying hearts and minds. This is what gives me hope for my country, for Sri Lanka, and for so many other societies struggling to recover from the scourge of war."<sup>25</sup>

Haiti is geographically far away from Myanmar and unlike Sri Lanka but (somewhat) like Myanmar in the sense that it has had (previous) military regimes though one supposes not as long as the loom, the blight, almost the continuous 'clutches' of the military in Burma/Myanmar since 1962. Just as Myanmar in May 2008 had to go through the devastating Cyclone Nargis, Haiti had to experience the massive earthquake of January 2010. To add to the woes of the Haitian people a cholera outbreak occurred subsequent to such a serious disaster. The response of the then Myanmar regime to Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and the response of the then Haitian government *vis-à-vis* the involvement of the United Nations and the international community in alleviating the havoc caused by the earthquake make for instructive, comparative reading.

Part III of Ban's book is titled "Human Rights and Development" which includes five Chapters including one on "Human Rights Born Free and Equal."<sup>26</sup> A sub-heading in the Chapter is "The Responsibility to Protect."<sup>27</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the February 1, 2021 military coup in Myanmar, in February and March 2021, hundreds of thousands of Burmese were on the streets demonstrating against the usurping, oppressive regime. Quite a few of the demonstrators carried English language placards 'R2P,' Where is the R2P?<sup>28</sup> The key paragraph under the sub-heading of "Responsibility to Protect" in Ban's book reads:

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 210.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 207.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 212.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 229.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 231.

<sup>28</sup> Global Center for the R2P, Applying R2P to Myanmar (Apr. 26, 2021), <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/applying-r2p-to-myanmar>.

Upon my urging the Security Council on March 17, 2011 authorized NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. Gaddafi was killed while on the run, and Russia, furious, accused the United States and the Europeans in the Security Council of pursuing a regime change in violation of their private assurances. *Russia vowed to veto future humanitarian interventions invoking R2P.*<sup>29</sup>

In March 2022 things were not just the same; it may be even worse. This time the requests for no fly zones to be declared in some airspace of Ukraine is made by among others Ukraine President Zelensky. These requests or demands cannot be made through a resolution of the UN Security Council since Russia is a veto-wielding permanent member. Instead, these requests are made to the United States and its European allies. ‘Interestingly’ but unsurprisingly United States and its European allies refused to declare (as of late March 2022) “no fly zones.”

The next section immediately after R2P is about the human rights of sexual minorities.<sup>30</sup> Would it be cynical of this reviewer if he states that gay and lesbian rights (at least in some circles especially in the UN and its workplaces) have advanced more than the hallowed in principle but almost ‘hollow’ in implementation and practice of the R2P doctrine?

Chapter Sixteen should be read conjunctively perhaps contrapuntally with Chapter Nine “Sudan: War Criminals, Refugees, and a Cow called Ban Ki-moo...”<sup>31</sup>; Chapter Eleven “Arab Spring: Season of Discontent”<sup>32</sup>; Chapter Twenty-One “Accountability: No Justice, No Peace.”<sup>33</sup>

The last part of Ban’s book Part IV is about “Our Future.” It has four Chapters “Accountability: No Justice, No Peace” (Chapter Twenty-One)<sup>34</sup>; “UN Reform: Making Room for the Future” (Chapter Twenty-Two);<sup>35</sup> and “Mission Possible: Its Our World, Nourish It” (Chapter Twenty- Three).<sup>36</sup>

Almost every UN Secretary-General who had the chance to write their memoirs<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup> BAN, *supra* note 3, at 232. [Emphasis added]

<sup>30</sup> ‘Suffering for whom you love.’ *See id.* at 233.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 119.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 152.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 305.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 315.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 329.

<sup>37</sup> Every former UN Secretary-General who had either resigned (Trygve Lie) or retired after serving two terms (U Thant, Kurt Waldheim, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Kofi Annan) and Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who after serving only one term had to retire due to the US’s veto to his second term, had published memoirs after they left the office of UN Secretary-General. The second Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld died in office and there were no memoirs post-retirement written by him. The first UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie’s memoirs IN THE CAUSE OF PEACE: SEVEN YEARS WITH THE UNITED

prefers to quote the first Secretary-General Trygve Lie's statement made to his successor Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. Trygve Lie stated that the UN Secretary-General's work is "the most impossible job on this Earth." The eighth Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also quotes Trygve Lie.<sup>38</sup> Yet, one of the previous UN Secretary-Generals perhaps Ban Ki-moon himself or Kofi Annan or another might have stated that the job of UN Secretary-General could be very rewarding as well. The 'rewards' (or are they perks?) of being a UN Secretary-General is to travel extensively (most of the time, indeed almost all of the time not for vacations or holidays one should add) and perhaps Ban Ki-moon may well be the most travelled UN Secretary-General. He stated that he had made 559 official visits to 154 countries during his tenure as Secretary-General and that his staff had estimated that he had flown far enough to travel to the moon and back six times!<sup>39</sup>

There are one or two factual errors or at least anomalies in the book one of which can be mentioned here. Ban wrote that 'In *January 2000* ... I was caught up in a diplomatic blunder that became a bilateral crisis between the administrations of newly elected President George W. Bush [and then South Korean president] Kim Dae Jung."<sup>40</sup> In January 2000, however, the President of the United States was Bill Clinton who was taking office until 20 January 2001. George W Bush (Bush senior) was President from January 1989 to January 1993. George W. Bush Jr. (Bush junior) was inaugurated as President on January 20, 2001. Hence, the events which Ban described as a "diplomatic blunder"<sup>41</sup> must have occurred after January 20, 2001 during President George W. Bush's administration and not in January 2000 and certainly not during President George W. Bush's term of office but during the administration of his son President George W. Bush.

Ban Ki-moon's memoirs, *RESOLVED UNITING NATIONS IN A DIVIDED WORLD* narrates articulately and compassionately the many issues that divide the world. The efforts and 'resolve' of the eighth UN Secretary-General (with the assistance of many of the UN staff members whose contributions he graciously acknowledges) to solve,

NATIONS (New York, Macmillan Co.) was published in 1954. The third UN Secretary-General U Thant's memoirs *VIEW FROM THE UN (Double Day)* was posthumously published in 1977. The fourth UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim's memoirs, *IN THE EYE OF THE STORM* (Adler & Adler) was published in 1986. The fifth UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's memoirs *PILGRIMAGE FOR PEACE: A SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MEMOIR* (Palgrave Macmillan) was published in 1997. The sixth UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's memoirs *UNVANQUISHED: A US- UN SAGA* (Random House) was published in 1999. The seventh UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's memoirs (with Nader Mousavizadeh) *INTERVENTIONS A LIFE IN WAR AND PEACE* (Penguin books) was published in 2013.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 331.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 200.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 25. [Emphasis added]

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 25-6.

'resolve' and to improve the human condition (so to speak) are reflected in the optimistic sentiment expressed in the concluding sentence of his book: "[t]ogether our mission is possible."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 332.