

ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Regardless of who gets named new head of the United Nations, the selection process for Secretary-General is in need of a radical overhaul.

BY THOMAS G. WEISS

BASEBALL TEAMS CHANGE THEIR MANAGERS with some frequency as losing records embarrass owners and ultimately disgruntle supporters. In contrast, the United Nations is "on a roll," but it will change its chief executive officer, after two successive five-year terms on 31 December.

His successor will inherit an organization whose renaissance could hardly have been imagined, let alone predicted, when Javier Perez de Cuellar assumed the leadership mantle. The rebound is even more spectacular in light of the financial nadir of the mid-1980s that almost destroyed the UN secretariat's morale and largely negated its ability to function.

The most important parts of the altered international landscape are political attitudes in East and West. After four decades of open hostility, or at best indifference, the sea change in the Soviet Union's attitudes toward world affairs and its born-again enthusiasm for the United Nations has been particularly dramatic. In the United States, successive Republican administrations have moved from "UN-bashing" to actively embracing the world organization when ousting Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. And the Third World, which began the decade by lamenting a lack of superpower enthusiasm for international institutions, can be heard these days in many quarters complaining that the UN is now frequently a fig-leaf for Washington's policies.

IN SPITE OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S RHETORIC, A "new world order" based on "the rule of law" is hardly imminent. Although an ideal collective security system envisaged by the UN Charter's architects is not feasible in the next decade, UN peace and security networks have become purposeful and effective. As the collegiality of the Security Council has increased steadily since 1987, influential and active governments have been paying more attention to this international safety net.

The United Nations has, in fact, moved to the centre of the security debate. It is now a plausible policy option even for the great powers, rather than a pipe-dream for fuzzy-

headed idealists or an afterthought when bilateral policy has foundered. While the economic and social organizations of the UN system play mainly a hortatory role and are ignored by governments large and small, there are a host of developmental and environmental challenges or catastrophes on the horizon. The world organization will certainly be called upon to play a more visible and crucial role in problem solving as the global community gropes toward the 21st century.

PREVIOUS HEADS OF THE UNITED NATIONS system have been three neutral Europeans (Trygve Lie from Norway, Dag Hammarskjöld from Sweden, and Kurt Waldheim from Austria), an Asian (U Thant from Burma), and a Latin American (Javier Perez de Cuellar). In light of the new demand for its services, the sixth UN Secretary-General must be exceptionally well-equipped – intellectually, constitutionally, morally – to take the helm of one of the world's more unmanageable vessels.

De Cuellar's heir will be the critical appointment of the 1990s. Yet, the international community has made no systematic effort to identify the most outstanding individual. To date, only candidates themselves and some of their governments are actively lobbying to secure a nomination. One list of candidates is said to include upwards of thirty-five names. As elsewhere in the UN system, geographical origins have come to take precedence over more mundane concerns, such as competence. And it is supposed to be "Africa's turn."

Yet, the numerous African candidates are generating little enthusiasm. Five were officially endorsed by African heads of state and government in early June. They include governmental ministers (Bernard Chidzero of Zimbabwe), an ex-president (Olesegun Obasanjo from Nigeria), UN officials (Kenneth Dadzie, the Ghanaian Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and James O.C. Jonah, a UN Under-Secretary-General from Sierra Leone), and the head of a non-governmental organization (Olara Otunnu, the Ugandan president of the International Peace Academy). However a new candidate has emerged receiving initially favourable re-

actions in New York diplomatic circles: Egypt's deputy prime minister, Boutros Boutros Ghali.

Other contenders from developing countries are also mentioned with some frequency: Tommy Koh (former UN ambassador from Singapore), Ali Alatas (Indonesian Foreign Minister), and Sadruddin Aga Khan (former High Commissioner for Refugees and present head of operations in the Persian Gulf).

British tabloids have speculated about Margaret Thatcher's availability, and interest in a national from a Security Council permanent member has been fuelled by Eduard Shevardnadze's remark that he would consider the post. Traditionally, neutral European countries furnish candidates. Martti Ahtisaari from Finland, who heads the UN's administration and oversaw the independence process in Namibia, has been joined by a quasi-neutral, Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. And now with the end of the Cold War, a national from a strong NATO country is not necessarily excluded from the race; so Canada's Joe Clark and Maurice Strong have also surfaced as contenders.

IN SPITE OF THE FLURRY OF NAMES, THERE HAS been far too little soul- and cv-searching to identify the best candidate for the globe's toughest job. While some UN ambassadors have met informally in New York, there is nothing resembling a search committee which would not only actively seek out candidates but also vet the professional and personal qualities of nominees. The hardest runners are, in fact, self-declared candidates.

Brian Urquhart – former UN Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs – has quipped that more time, resources, and energy are spent by the Ford Foundation in selecting a junior officer than by the international community in choosing its Secretary-General. Certainly a search to fill a major university chair or senior administrative appointment involves far more extensive publicity, interviewing, and consideration of a potential candidate's intellect and character.

What has happened over the past forty-six years to allow the choice of the United Nations