

Will Barack Obama Be The Next UN Secretary General?

In slightly less than four months, President Barack Obama will be without a job—unless he has another one already lined up.

Rumors are swirling that Obama is already lobbying to take the job of United Nations Secretary-General when Ban Ki-moon's final five-year term expires on Dec. 31. Those rumors are similar to ones made in the final year of President Bill Clinton's second term in office.

And like those 16-year-old rumors, these latest ones are false.

For starters, the process of replacing Ban is already well underway with 10 candidates—mainly from Eastern European nations—under consideration. The U.N. Security Council, which is required by Article 97 of the U.N. Charter to make the appointment of a successor, is already holding straw votes over:

- António Guterres—a former Portuguese prime minister and U.N. high commissioner
- Dr. Srgjan Kerim—a former Macedonian foreign minister and President of the 62nd U.N. General Assembly
- Dr. Danilo Türk—a former Slovenian president and former U.N. Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs
- Irina Bokova—a Bulgarian and current Director-General of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- Natalia Gherman—a former Moldovan foreign affairs minister and former deputy prime minister
- Helen Clark—a former New Zealand prime minister and current administrator of the U.N. Development Program
- Vuk Jeremić—a former Serbian foreign affairs minister

and President of the 67th U.N. General Assembly

- Susana Malcorra—current foreign minister of Argentina and a former U.N. General Secretariat cabinet chief, serving under Ban
- Miroslav Lajčák—current Slovak deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs
- Kristalina Georgieva—a Bulgarian who currently serves as European Commissioner for the Budget and Human Resources

After two rounds of straw ballots in the Security Council, Guterres is the current front-runner for the job. But Georgieva is a brand-new candidate, having joined the race Wednesday morning. The next round of unofficial balloting will take place next Wednesday.

Throwing President Obama into the mix would not just ruffle a lot of feathers, it would require some unprecedented maneuvers, both at the U.N. Headquarters in New York City and in Washington, D.C. While it's not a written rule, it has been the longstanding custom that the U.N. Secretary-General should not be the citizen of a country that is a permanent member of the council: the U.S., Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom.

Additionally, General Assembly resolution 51/241, adopted in 1997, stated that the appointment of a new Secretary-General must be done by taking into account a candidate's region and gender. Of the eight secretaries-general so far, none have been women, and none have come from Eastern Europe, Australia/Oceania, or North America/Latin America.

Even if an Obama candidacy overcame those hurdles, there's the fact that Ban's term ends 21 days before Obama's term as president ends. Although there is precedent for the position to remain vacant for an extended period of time—particularly during the Cold War when the U.S. and Soviet Union often failed to agree on a candidate—the last four secretaries-generals' terms began immediately at the conclusion of their

predecessors'.

For that to happen, Obama would have to resign the presidency in order to take the new job, which would make Vice President Joe Biden the 45th President of the United States—albeit for just three weeks—until the winner of November's general election could be sworn in on the constitutionally-appointed date.