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While scientists, politicians, journalists, and internet trolls keep fighting over the origins of COVID-19, a former world leader is lying about his organization's role in an earlier epidemic.

In a new memoir about his decade at the helm of the United Nations, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon devotes a chapter to the earthquake and cholera epidemic that ravaged Haiti in 2010. Both were low points in Ban's career. After the earthquake (which in addition to killing 100,000 to 316,000 Haitians, caused the largest single-event loss of life in U.N. history: the total destruction of the five-story U.N. headquarters in Port-au-Prince), Ban helped oversee a failed recovery effort that saved almost no one and left Haitians on the whole worse off than before.

Nine months later, a contingent of U.N. peacekeepers from Nepal, stationed in a part of the country far outside the quake zone, caused the deadliest cholera outbreak in recent history, when they allowed their infected feces to contaminate Haiti's most important river system. U.N. personnel reacted by lying, destroying evidence, and encouraging partner organizations such as the World Health Organization and CDC not to investigate the outbreak's origins. Six years later, pressured by an internal report (leaked to yours truly), Ban's office acknowledged the U.N.'s role and issued a tepid and vague apology.

In his new memoir, *Resolved*, Ban seems eager to undo whatever limited goodwill that apology earned. In the chapter (titled, incoherently, "From Earthquake to Heartbreak"), the ex-U.N. leader lays in to pretty much everyone in Haiti his organization failed or outright killed.

Ban savages the late Haitian President René Préval as essentially an inept coward ("terrified," "panicked," "clearly in shock and unprepared")—mostly for Préval's unwillingness to give a national radio address to rally his countrymen in the earthquake's aftermath. (A funny complaint for as singularly uninspiring a speaker as the former Secretary-General.) He then, contradictorily, blames Haitian lawmakers for not fulsomely backing reconstruction initiatives proposed by Préval and his successor Michel Martelly.

One might assume Ban feels he is complaining on behalf of the impoverished Haitian masses, but no, he's got words for them too. He portrays the population on the whole as an ungrateful lot, griping about U.N. peacekeepers' lack of assistance "with rescue and emergency repairs" —

ignorant, Ban says, of the troop's patrols of the "increasingly dangerous" postquake tent camps, in essence keeping Haitians safe from themselves.

But the cholera section is where Ban really lets his frustrations fly. His recounting of the epidemic's origins is at once incoherent, contradictory, and mendacious. It begins:

In October 2010, only ten months after the earthquake, several people in the northern countryside contracted the highly contagious disease. The seemingly isolated cholera cases raised no alarms for UN field staff or the peacekeeping base nearby. But the bacteria—spread by infected water and human waste—got into a small tributary that feeds the Artibonite River, which thousands used for drinking, washing, and bathing.

Nearly all of that is wrong, from the biggest details to the smallest. (It was nine months, not ten; the outbreak started in central Haiti, not the north, etc.) But most important, Ban is either lying about or intentionally obfuscating the order of events. His implication here is that rural Haitians started getting sick before the infectious bacteria entered the Artibonite watershed—which, if true, would for all intents and purposes absolve the U.N. peacekeepers of responsibility for the outbreak. Unfortunately for him, there is no evidence that such cases existed. (That is, unless the "isolated cases" that "raised no alarms for UN field staff" he is recalling were Nepalese soldiers, which would be a bombshell of a different kind.)

He recalls the investigation of his own appointed "independent panel" of scientists, who "did not fully exonerate the United Nations but found that 'a confluence of circumstances' contributed to the outbreak." That is true as far as it goes, but fails to note that the "circumstances" listed were all factors that contributed to the outbreak's spread, which said nothing about the outbreak's initial cause.

But from there, his recollection gets downright baffling. Ban mentions a World Health Organization report that "traced the source of the cholera epidemic directly ... to the Nepalese peacekeepers." No one I asked at the United Nations was aware of any such report; a WHO spokeswoman told me, tersely: "We are not aware of any such report."

"Given the disparities" between this phantom report and his own self-serving interpretation of the "independent panel" study, Ban then claims to have "ordered another investigation ... released on August 8, 2016" which "found no doubt that the Nepalese peacekeepers—specifically a sanitation contractor—allowed fecal waste to contaminate the waters."

That can only be a garbled reference to the internal report of Special Rapporteur Philip Alston—indeed dated Aug. 8, 2016, but only "released" insofar as it was leaked to me and described in my *New York Times* stories nine days later. Rather than being "another investigation," Alston's report summarized facts that had become widely known by that point. Its key contribution was not a new investigation but Alston's evisceration of Ban Ki-moon's political position—which, as he put it, was "morally unconscionable, legally indefensible, and politically self-defeating."

It seems Ban forgot that lesson entirely. He spends the rest of the chapter smearing the lawyers of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, who tried to achieve some measure of justice for the families of the estimated 10,000 people killed and hundreds of thousands sickened as a result of the U.N.'s negligence. Here he gets the details tellingly wrong again: ignoring the fact that IJDH initially tried to achieve redress within the UN system only to be rebuffed, then falsely claiming that their resulting lawsuit in U.S. federal court was an attempt to "extort," in his words, an astronomical (and wholly fictitious) amount of money.

When the lawsuit was dismissed, thanks to the arguments of Barack Obama's Justice Department, Ban says he was "too relieved for words."

I've long believed that Ban's unwillingness to accept full responsibility for his organization's crimes in Haiti was due to U.S. pressure. As Alston told me in 2017, it was basically the result of "legal advice that is coming from the U.S. State Department and then echoed by the U.N. Office of Legal Affairs."

Ban's memoir, written as he eases into retirement and senescence at the age of 77, was an opportunity to set the record straight, make a meaningful apology, and put pressure not only on his former organization but the world powers that bankroll it (including the United States) to make actual recompense to the people whose lives they destroyed. Instead, it's just another sad reminder that neither those who have tasted power, nor the responsibility they ran, can be trusted to hold themselves accountable on their own.

*Jonathan Myerson Katz is the author of the upcoming **Gangsters of Capitalism: Smedley Butler, The Marines, and the Making and Breaking of America's Empire**, coming January 2022 from St. Martin's Press. His first book, **The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster**, was a PEN Literary Award finalist and won the Overseas Press Club of America's Cornelius Ryan Award for the year's best book on international affairs. He is also a recipient of the James Foley/Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism. On Twitter @KatzOnEarth.*