

THE URGENT NEED FOR UN REFORM

*The UN's response to October 7 makes reform more urgent than ever.
UN reform used to be a bipartisan priority — it must now be again.*

BY ALAN GOLDSMITH

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FOREWORD

By Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Richard Goldberg

Few moments in its history have so completely exposed the decay of the United Nations into a labyrinth of anti-American bureaucracies as Hamas's October 7 massacre. In Gaza, we see evidence of the UN Relief and Works Agency and World Health Organization complicit in Hamas war crimes, while others like the World Food Programme parrot Hamas propaganda. In New York and Geneva, from the Security Council and UN Women to the Human Rights Council and the WHO, groups refuse to condemn Hamas and its crimes against humanity — their condemnation is reserved solely for the victims of the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. The UN secretary-general himself may go down as the greatest enabler of this blatant antisemitism.

Threats to U.S. interests coming from the UN system are not confined to antisemitism, Israel, or Hamas. Since establishing FDD's International Organizations Program, FDD scholars have documented how China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and other U.S. adversaries exploit the UN system to undermine the United States. The January 2021 monograph *From Trump to Biden* outlined a strategy of using American leverage inside international organizations to counter U.S. adversaries.¹ A June 2021 monograph, *A Better Blueprint for International Organizations*, explained how the United States could condition aid to win concrete reforms at a dozen UN agencies.² Instead, the Biden administration is repeating the mistakes of the Obama administration — insisting that engagement and diplomatic niceties could advance reform without asserting U.S. pressure or utilizing our outsized leverage. This strategy has failed.

This need not be a partisan debate. Indeed, the cause of UN reform was historically bipartisan for most of the late 20th century. If ever there was a moment to find a way back to this bipartisanship and put UN reform back on the agenda, this is that moment. In this memo, Alan Goldsmith, a former employee and colleague on Capitol Hill who worked on UN reform as a professional staff member for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, presents a compelling case for a bipartisan UN reform campaign. He walks us through the history of such efforts, detailing case studies of reform attempts and outlining the tools Congress and the executive branch have at their disposal. Anyone remotely interested in driving a UN reform agenda will want to keep this memo handy.

1. "From Trump to Biden," Eds. John Hannah and David Adesnik, *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, January 14, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/01/14/from-trump-to-biden>)

2. "A Better Blueprint for International Organizations," Ed. Richard Goldberg, *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 30, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/06/30/a-better-blueprint-for-international-organizations>)

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) is the world's leading international organization, symbolizing multilateral cooperation and a vision to improve the world. However, the UN is also synonymous with inaction and ineffectiveness, mismanagement and malfeasance, bias and farce. It has become a tool to advance the interests and values of U.S. adversaries, like Russia and China, and to serve their interests — often to the detriment of America and the free world. And, as demonstrated in the wake of the Hamas massacre of October 7, 2023, the UN has become a tool used by purveyors of Jew-hatred.

Troubled by the UN's flaws and its frequent alignment against the United States, critics advocate withdrawal from the UN in its entirety. This is understandable but counterproductive. The conduct of some UN agencies is indeed incompatible with U.S. participation. Others are amenable to American influence. Among the latter, the record shows that when Washington goes on offense, using all its diplomatic muscle and financial leverage, it can achieve positive outcomes. If America ignores these levers of influence, it cedes a crucial arena to its greatest adversaries.

This report thus recommends a two-track approach to the UN: participating fully in UN bodies responsive to reform but withdrawing from those that are hostile to necessary changes. America should seek to change the hostile bodies from the outside where possible and work to dismantle those bodies if they prove irredeemable.

This two-track approach reflects the lessons learned from the long history of both congressional and executive branch campaigns to reform the UN. From the early 1970s until the end of the 20th century, the United States conditioned its funding for, and membership in, UN bodies based upon their readiness to enact reforms. In the 21st century, however, Washington has increasingly embraced a policy of unconditional U.S. financial support for, and membership in, UN entities. This stems from a mistaken belief that demonstrations of loyalty to the UN can serve as leverage for reform.

Examining the history of these contrasting approaches reveals that the former approach usually achieves better outcomes than the latter. Conditionality must remain in place to ensure that the UN does not backtrack on its reform pledges. In addition, bipartisan support for conditionality serves as the bedrock of U.S. leverage so that the UN and its agencies do not simply drag their feet on reform while waiting for the election of a more accommodating president or Congress.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration is pursuing a policy of unconditional engagement, which predictably undermines both its own reform agenda and American interests. Examples of this flawed policy include the U.S. decision to remain part of the World Health Organization (WHO) and to rejoin the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) without insisting upon major reforms.

Holding the UN accountable through words and deeds is the best way to force it to perform better or suffer reduced funding and relevance. If both parties come together behind this approach, it can gradually repair the institution to serve the interests of the free world while upholding its values.

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL UN

Dictatorships dominate the UN's key bodies, advancing their own malign agendas at the expense of Western democracies. This problem has spanned decades. During the Cold War, the UN became a key arena for conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, both of which — along with China, France, and the United Kingdom — were permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC). The Soviet Union frequently vetoed resolutions supported by Washington and often backed regimes responsible for egregious human rights abuses.

Waste, fraud, and abuse pervade the UN, while whistleblowers face punishment, firing, and legal battles. For example, the UN fired one of its most prominent whistleblowers, Emma Reilly, after she disclosed that UN officials handed over the names of Chinese dissidents to Beijing. Another whistleblower, Aicha Elbasri, lost her job after she exposed efforts by UN officials to conceal crimes against humanity in Darfur. Yet another whistleblower, John O'Brien, was terminated after he reported corruption and financial mismanagement at the UN Development Programme in Russia.

China, one of the most powerful countries in the UN, poses an additional problem. At the UNSC and other bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council, Beijing prevents investigation of its own human rights abuses, such as its persecution of the Uighurs. More broadly, Beijing seeks to reshape the UN system in a way that would increase its autonomy and influence on the global stage and secure immunity from condemnation. Beijing routinely votes against U.S. positions in multiple UN bodies, particularly at the UNSC, where it often partners with Russia to counteract Washington.³

Moreover, the UN singles out Israel for condemnation more frequently than all other countries in the world combined, including major human rights abusers like Cuba, North Korea, and Syria. Perhaps the UN's most infamous attack against Israel came in 1975 when the General Assembly passed a resolution calling Zionism a form of racism. But while the UN ultimately repealed the resolution in 1991, the decades since have shown little improvement. The UN Human Rights Council, for example, maintains a standing agenda item devoted exclusively to Israel but does so for no other country. UN fact-finding missions and investigations — often initiatives of rogue regimes — regarding Israel's supposed human rights abuses proliferate at multiple UN bodies.⁴

The UN is resistant to reform. History shows that the best hope for change is bipartisan support for withholding U.S. funding, an approach that achieved considerable success through the 1990s.

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3. Benjamin Mueller, "W.H.O. Accuses China of Hiding Data That May Link Covid's Origins to Animals," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2023. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/17/health/covid-origins-who.html>)

4. Hillel C. Neuer, "Antisemitism and Discrimination Against Israel at the United Nations," *Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations*, June 22, 2023. (<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA06/20230622/116138/HHRG-118-FA06-Wstate-NeuerH-20230622.pdf>)

EARLY CASES OF SUCCESSFUL U.S. PRESSURE ON THE UN

INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION

The earliest major example of U.S. efforts to leverage its funding and membership to produce UN reform involves the International Labor Organization (ILO). Founded in 1919 under the League of Nations and later integrated into the UN, the ILO aims to set international labor standards.⁵ The ILO's founders intended to address a particular problem: Even countries inclined to improve their domestic working conditions were afraid to do so lest they be placed at a competitive disadvantage to states with fewer labor protections.⁶ The organization has a unique tripartite makeup, with General Conference delegates representing governments, employers, and labor unions in member states.⁷ The mandate is to set standards for every member state to maintain.

The United States, an ILO member since 1934, grew frustrated with the ILO beginning in 1954 when it admitted the Soviet Union over American objections. The Soviets did not grant freedom to employers or laborers, violating multiple ILO conventions and undermining the logic behind the tripartite structure. Since the USSR had no independent employers or labor unions, the Kremlin controlled the votes of all Soviet delegates. This problem was exacerbated when the ILO admitted more unfree countries in the 1950s and 1960s, stacking the deck against free markets and organized labor.⁸

The last straw for the United States was the appointment of a Soviet national as ILO assistant director-general in 1970. The Democratic-controlled Congress, with AFL-CIO support, withheld U.S. contributions from the ILO — 25 percent of its budget — from 1970 to 1972.⁹

The ILO's problems worsened in 1974 at its General Conference. Without following its own rules of commissioning an investigation by its Committee of Experts, the General Conference passed a resolution condemning Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza and Israeli labor practices in those territories. By contrast, when the Committee of Experts issued a report condemning the USSR for violating international conventions against the use of forced labor, the General Conference did not adopt that report. One year later, the General Conference also granted observer status to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a terrorist group.¹⁰

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5. "About the ILO," *International Labor Organization*, accessed January 28, 2023. (<https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-en/index.htm>); Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 14.

6. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 14.

7. "About the ILO," *International Labor Organization*, accessed January 28, 2023. (<https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang-en/index.htm>); Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 14.

8. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 15.

9. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 16; Helen Dewar, "Carter Expected To Announce U.S. Is Quitting ILO," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 1977. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/11/01/carter-expected-to-announce-us-is-quitting-ilo/4bca21d1-cb10-47f7-8a38-2f60888a6696>)

10. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 16; "U.S. Reported Ready to Leave the I.L.O.," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1977. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/01/archives/usreported-ready-to-leave-the-i-lo-carter-is-said-to-reach-decision.html>)

Congress responded by reducing its contribution to the ILO for 1975 and providing no contribution for 1976. In 1975, the Ford administration gave the ILO the required two-years' notice of American intent to fully withdraw. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger cited the undermining of the ILO's tripartite structure, its double standards in the treatment of human rights issues, its violations of due process, and its increasing politicization.¹¹

Kissinger made clear that the United States would "make every possible effort to promote the conditions which will facilitate our continued participation," but "[i]f this should prove impossible, we are in fact prepared to depart."¹² The Ford administration also established a cabinet-level committee to monitor ILO reforms.

After Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford in 1976, the choice of whether to leave the ILO fell to the new president. Carter's senior domestic policy adviser, Stuart Eizenstat, argued for leaving, giving reasons that remain sound to this day. Eizenstat noted that U.S. credibility was at stake; that a U.S. departure might encourage ILO members to undertake serious reforms; that withdrawal would not likely harm other U.S. multilateral and UN efforts; and that if the United States stayed, Congress might attempt to withhold U.S. financial support.¹³

In June 1977, the General Conference rejected reforms related to ending double standards, diminishing politicization, and respecting due process.¹⁴ Consequently, in November 1977, the United States announced its withdrawal.¹⁵

America's departure soon had the desired impact. In 1978, the ILO began to do its job. It censured Czechoslovakia for violating the organization's standards banning discrimination in employment. It also opened investigations into transgressions against labor union rights in Poland and the USSR. That year, the General Conference voted against a resolution that would have condemned purported Israeli violations of working standards in the West Bank and Gaza without first conducting an investigation.¹⁶

Western and Third World member states also agreed on rules to filter out resolutions violating due process. The next year, the General Conference changed its rules to allow for voting by secret ballot, potentially enabling employers and workers from Communist countries to vote as they wished without fear of retaliation. Finally, the ILO's director-general committed to appointing Americans to top jobs if Washington rejoined. The Carter administration, with organized labor's support, chose to resume its membership in the ILO in 1980.¹⁷

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11. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 17.

12. *Ibid.*, page 18

13. *Ibid.*, pages 20-21

14. Michael K. Mixson, "United Nations-United States Withdraws from the International Labor Organization," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 1978, pages 498-501.

15. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, pages 19-21; Helen Dewar, "Carter Expected To Announce U.S. Is Quitting ILO," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1977. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/11/01/carter-expected-to-announce-us-is-quitting-ilo/4bca21d1-cb10-47f7-8a38-2f60888a6696>) "U.S. Reported Ready to Leave the I.L.O.," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1977. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/01/archives/usreported-ready-to-leave-the-i-lo-carter-is-said-to-reach-decision.html>)

16. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 22.

17. Paul E. Masters, "The International Labor Organization: America's Withdrawal and Reentry," *International Social Science Review*, 1996, page 23; U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Statement, "International Labor Organization Statement on the U.S. Decision To Rejoin the Organization," February 13, 1980. (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/international-labor-organization-statement-the-us-decision-rejoin-the-organization>)

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Another early example of successful U.S. pressure involves the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an organization founded in 1945. As the number of authoritarian member states increased at the UN, UNESCO became politicized and began to serve as a vehicle for the Arab and Soviet campaign against Israel. In the early 1970s, UNESCO adopted resolutions condemning Israel and blocking the Jewish state from joining the organization's European regional group.¹⁸ Washington employed its funding as leverage, yet the agency resisted reform, ultimately provoking an American withdrawal. This had no immediate effect, yet more than a decade later, UNESCO enacted changes that were sufficient to bring America back in. However, another decade down the line, the body relapsed into hostility toward Israel. Washington initially responded by pulling its funding and — eventually — its membership. In 2022, the Biden administration returned to UNESCO despite the absence of reform.

In the 1970s, UN member states began to push the concept of a “new world information and communication order” (NWICO), with the theoretical goal of expanding developing countries’ communications capabilities. However, in practice, Tunisia and some other member states wielded NWICO to violate press freedom by censoring journalists. UNESCO also produced educational curricula that took a pro-Soviet line on “peace and disarmament” and other politically sensitive topics.¹⁹ Even writer Michael Massing, a defender of the organization, admitted that “UNESCO’s peace programs do often seem to have an anti[-]Western orientation.”²⁰ As if that were not enough, UNESCO suffered from dysfunctional management.²¹

In 1983, Congress enacted the Beard Amendment, named for Representative Robin Beard (R-TN), which required the president to withhold U.S. contributions from UNESCO if the body took actions that limited press freedom.²² At the end of 1983, the Reagan administration, fed up with UNESCO’s trajectory and growing budgets, announced that it would leave UNESCO in one year.²³

The way in which the United States ultimately withdrew can serve as a model. The Reagan administration outlined all of its problems with UNESCO, citing the organization’s limited effort to reform itself; established an independent panel to observe reform efforts and report back on them; affirmed its commitment to rejoining upon the implementation of necessary reforms; established an observer mission to UNESCO to defend American

18. Christopher C. Joyner and Scott A. Lawson, “The United States and UNESCO: Rethinking the Decision to Withdraw,” *International Journal*, Winter 1985-86, page 49; “Full Israeli Rights in UNESCO Restored,” *Associated Press*, November 23, 1976. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/23/archives/full-israeli-rights-in-unesco-restored.html>)

19. Christopher C. Joyner and Scott A. Lawson, “The United States and UNESCO: Rethinking the Decision to Withdraw,” *International Journal*, Winter 1985-86, pages 49, 51.

20. Michael Massing, “Unesco Under Fire: While Attacking UNESCO’s Shortcomings, the Reagan Administration Has Ignored Its Many Strengths,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1984. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1984/07/unesco-under-fire/666637>)

21. Susan Tift, “Waving Goodbye to UNESCO,” *Time*, January 9, 1984. (<https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/printout/0,8816,952288,00.html>)

22. Christopher C. Joyner and Scott A. Lawson, “The United States and UNESCO: Rethinking the Decision to Withdraw,” *International Journal*, Winter 1985-86, pages 46-47.

23. Daniel F. Gilmore, “United States Announces Withdrawal from UNESCO,” *United Press International*, December 29, 1983. (<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/12/29/United-States-announces-withdrawal-from-UNESCO/6042441522000>); “Text of Statement by U.S. on its Withdrawal from UNESCO,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1984. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/20/world/text-of-statement-by-us-on-its-withdrawal-from-unesco.html>)

interests and work with other countries on reform; and stated its “support for international activities in the fields of education, science, culture and communication through other existing channels.”²⁴

Support for U.S. withdrawal was bipartisan, including from leading Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale and from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.²⁵ At the end of 1985, the United Kingdom and Singapore also ended their membership for similar reasons, demonstrating international dissatisfaction with UNESCO.²⁶

The U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO saved American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and eventually forced the organization to reform. In 1999, the new director-general, Koichiro Matsuura, instituted budgetary and management reforms. America rejoined UNESCO in 2002 under President George W. Bush.²⁷ Washington made it clear that withdrawal from UN bodies reflected not antipathy to multilateralism but a determination that those bodies do not sufficiently advance U.S. interests and values to justify membership.

Nearly a decade later, however, UNESCO posed fresh challenges to U.S. policy. As this report will discuss, Congress in the early 1990s enacted legislation prohibiting U.S. contributions to any UN entity that admitted a nonexistent Palestinian state. In 2011, over U.S. opposition, UNESCO’s General Conference voted to admit “the State of Palestine” as a member state amidst a PLO-led effort to declare statehood unilaterally.²⁸ The member states voting in favor may not have cared if UNESCO lost U.S. funding over the decision, but it is just as likely they believed the Obama administration would not implement U.S. law and cut off UNESCO contributions. However, the administration did indeed cut funding while simultaneously seeking a waiver from Congress to allow continued contributions. Congress, though, did not grant a waiver until 2022.²⁹

Losing U.S. funding did not prompt UNESCO’s members to reconsider granting membership to the Palestinians. Instead, UNESCO’s General Conference doubled down, characterizing Israel’s presence in eastern Jerusalem as “occupation”; referring to locations in Jerusalem important to all three major Abrahamic religions, such as the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, exclusively by their Muslim names; and designating historic Jewish places in the West Bank as exclusively Palestinian heritage sites.³⁰

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24. “Text of Statement by U.S. on its Withdrawal from UNESCO,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1984. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/20/world/text-of-statement-by-us-on-its-withdrawal-from-unesco.html>)

25. Michael Massing, “Unesco Under Fire: While Attacking UNESCO’s Shortcomings, the Reagan Administration Has Ignored Its Many Strengths,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1984. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1984/07/unesco-under-fire/666637>)

26. “Britain Following Lead of U.S., Will Withdraw From UNESCO,” *Associated Press*, December 5, 1985. (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-12-05-mn-371-story.html>)

27. Joseph Fitchett, “Bush gains praise over U.S. return to Unesco,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 14, 2002. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/14/news/bush-gains-praise-over-us-return-to-unesco.html>)

28. “UNESCO votes to admit Palestine as full member,” *UN News*, October 31, 2011. (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/10/393562>)

29. Hilary Leila Krieger, “Rice: UNESCO funding reduction hurts US,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), March 20, 2012. (<https://www.jpost.com/International/Rice-UNESCO-funding-reduction-hurts-US>); Sara Sorcher, “Lawmakers Not Yet Convinced to Fund UNESCO After Palestinian Bid,” *National Journal*, March 20, 2012. (<https://kaygranger.house.gov/2012/3/national-journal-lawmakers-not-yet-convinced-fund-unesco-after-palestinian-bid>); Mark Felsenthal, “White House urges Congress to regain U.S. UNESCO vote,” *Reuters*, November 9, 2013. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-unesco-whitehouse/white-house-urges-congress-to-regain-u-s-unesco-vote-idUKBRE9A80EE20131109>)

30. Thomas Adamson, “U.S. and Israel officially withdraw from UNESCO,” *Associated Press*, January 1, 2019. (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-and-israel-officially-withdraw-from-unesco>); Harriet Sherwood, “Israeli anger at Unesco motion’s failure to link holy site to Judaism,” *The Guardian* (UK), October 13, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/13/israeli-anger-unesco-motion-condemning-aggressions-holy-site-jerusalem>)

In October 2017, the Trump administration gave UNESCO one year's notice that the United States would leave (not just defund) the organization and create a permanent observer mission to UNESCO. "This decision was not taken lightly," the State Department said, citing "U.S. concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and continuing anti-Israel bias." In 2018, the United States ended its membership, primarily to stop accumulating arrears due to nonpayment of assessed contributions.³¹ Israel joined the United States in leaving UNESCO in January 2019.³² However, the Biden administration ultimately reentered UNESCO in 2023.

U.S. REFORM EFFORTS (1980-2016)

Since the 1980s, the U.S. government — usually with Congress taking the lead and with varying levels of support from the executive branch — has advanced multiple initiatives that leveraged U.S. funding to influence the UN. These included the Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment, the Pressler Amendment, and the Helms-Biden Act. Unlike later reform initiatives, such as the Henry J. Hyde United Nations Reform Act and the United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act, these earned robust bipartisan support. At the same time, Congress failed to fully implement and enforce some of these reform initiatives, thereby limiting their impact.

KASSEBAUM-SOLOMON AMENDMENT

The Kassebaum-Solomon amendment to the biennial Foreign Relations Authorization Act, a bipartisan congressional initiative named for Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) and Representative Gerald B. H. Solomon (R-NY), was adopted in 1985 and withheld U.S. funding to the UN until Washington was given a greater say in UN budgeting.

Funding for the UN's main budget, called the "regular budget," comes from member states' contributions based on a complicated formula approved by the UNGA that purportedly is based on "capacity to pay."³³ This may seem fair in theory, comparable to progressive taxation, but in practice, the system suffers from the freeloader problem.

While the United States has only one vote, it is assessed 22 percent of the regular budget by the UNGA³⁴ and almost 27 percent of the UN's peacekeeping budget.³⁵ By contrast, more than two-thirds of member states — enough votes to approve budgets — pay a combined total of under 2 percent for both the regular and peacekeeping budgets.³⁶

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31. U.S. Department of State, Press Statement, "The United States Withdraws From UNESCO," October 12, 2017. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181219060337/https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/10/274748.htm>)

32. Thomas Adamson, "U.S. and Israel officially withdraw from UNESCO," *Associated Press*, January 1, 2019. (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-and-israel-officially-withdraw-from-unesco>)

33. United Nations, "Rules and Procedure of the General Assembly," September 15, 2022, pages 44-45. (https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/pdf/A_520_Rev.20.pdf); "Regular budget and working capital fund," Committee on Contributions, United Nations General Assembly, accessed January 21, 2023. (<https://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/budget.shtml>)

34. United Nations Secretariat, "Assessment of Member States' advances to the Working Capital Fund for 2023 and contributions to the United Nations regular budget for 2023," January 11, 2023, page 12. (https://documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=ST/ADM/SER.B/1052&i=ST/ADM/SER.B/1052_1725344)

35. United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General: addendum," December 28, 2021, page 2. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3952481>)

36. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 76/238, December 24, 2021, pages 3-7. (<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/418/88/pdf/n2141888.pdf?token=fOpNPI7WMx4kTZkx6x&fe=true>); United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General: addendum," December 28, 2021, pages 2-7. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3952481>)

Thus, as former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Jeane Kirkpatrick said, “Those countries who have the votes don’t pay the bills, while those who pay the bills don’t have the votes.”³⁷

Consequently, most member states have little incentive to exercise fiscal discipline. It is not their money. Meanwhile, the UN’s big donor countries pay their assessments, no matter the cost.

In 1985, the UN’s budget had tripled over the previous 10 years, with the United States assessed 25 percent of the cost.³⁸ Congress consequently adopted the Kassebaum-Solomon amendment,³⁹ which, beginning in fiscal year 1987, prohibited payment of assessed contributions that exceeded 20 percent of the budget of the UN and its specialized agencies unless each member state’s voting power was “proportionate” to its contribution.⁴⁰ This enjoyed broad and bipartisan support, with the amendment passing the Senate 71-13.⁴¹

The Reagan administration wielded the amendment to advance its budgetary objectives at the UN. “What I’m doing on the basis of that amendment is trying to make as much constructive use of it as I can to get people’s attention,” said Secretary of State George Shultz. He called the UN’s budget system “taxation without representation,” adding, “People who pay practically nothing can vote equally with us to take money from the American taxpayers. I think we have a right to scream about it and try to get it more in line.”⁴²

The UNGA quickly established a group of high-level intergovernmental experts (the Group of 18) to “review the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning” of the UN and offer corrective recommendations.⁴³ UNGA adopted the majority of the group’s recommendations and, in December 1986, made them the basis for budgetary decision-making.⁴⁴

37. “U.S. Role in the U.N. Is Debated,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 1983. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20150524135726/https://www.nytimes.com/1983/10/10/world/us-role-in-the-un-is-debated.html>)

38. Elaine Sciolino, “Kassebaum Bill Has U.N. Worried,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1985. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/06/world/kassebaum-bill-has-un-worried.html>)

39. Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, pages 51-52. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>); Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1986 and 1987, Pub. L. 99-93, 99 Stat. 424-425, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §2651 note. (<https://www.congress.gov/99/statute/STATUTE-99/STATUTE-99-Pg405.pdf>); Elaine Sciolino, “Kassebaum Bill Has U.N. Worried,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1985. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/06/world/kassebaum-bill-has-un-worried.html>)

40. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1986 and 1987, Pub. L. 99-93, 99 Stat. 424-425, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §2651 note. (<https://www.congress.gov/99/statute/STATUTE-99/STATUTE-99-Pg405.pdf>); Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1986 and 1987, S. 1003, 99th Congress (1985-1986), S.Amdt. 293, Actions, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/amendment/99th-congress/senate-amendment/293/actions?r=40&s=a>)

41. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1986 and 1987, S. 1003, 99th Congress (1985-1986), S.Amdt. 293, Cosponsors, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/amendment/99th-congress/senate-amendment/293/cosponsors?r=40&s=a>)

42. Elaine Sciolino, “Kassebaum Bill Has U.N. Worried,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1985. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/06/world/kassebaum-bill-has-un-worried.html>)

43. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 40/237, December 18, 1985. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/106930?ln=en>). Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 52. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>)

44. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 41/213, December 19, 1986. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/126385?ln=en>); Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 52. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>); Benjamin Rivlin, “UN Reform from the Standpoint of the United States,” *Speech before the United Nations University*, September 25, 1995. (<https://archive.unu.edu/unupress/lecture11.html>)

Congress and President Reagan soon determined that the UNGA-adopted reforms satisfied the Kassebaum-Solomon amendment's terms. Washington resumed paying most of its assessed contributions. (Over half a billion dollars in arrears accumulated in the interim and remained unpaid for years to come.) Importantly, Congress included a provision in future foreign relations authorization bills — all bipartisan and passed with overwhelming majorities in both chambers — that conditioned the payment of 20 percent of assessed contributions on presidential certification of continued UN progress in budgetary reforms.⁴⁵

In the biennial Foreign Relations Authorization Act passed in 1994, the 20 percent withholding changed from mandatory to discretionary.⁴⁶ The next biennial authorization bill included similar language but did not become law due to a presidential veto by President Bill Clinton,⁴⁷ and the 1998 authorization legislation omitted the withholding language entirely.⁴⁸ This removed U.S. leverage to pressure the UN to continue “consensus-based” budgeting. In late 2007, over U.S. objections, the UNGA adopted a biennial budget that increased spending by 25 percent, ending the tradition of fiscal decision-making by consensus.⁴⁹

DEFEAT OF THE PLO'S ATTEMPT TO JOIN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In 1989, Yasser Arafat's PLO sought to gain international recognition of a “State of Palestine” by gaining membership in multilateral organizations, starting with the World Health Organization (WHO).⁵⁰ The George H.W. Bush administration sought to prevent this effort to politicize a UN technical organization and to bypass negotiations with Israel. The administration used the leverage of U.S. funding to accomplish this objective. Secretary of State James A. Baker III issued a statement saying:

The United States vigorously opposes the admission of the P.L.O. to membership in the World Health Organization or any other U.N. agencies ... To emphasize the depth of our concern, I will recommend to the President that the United States make no further contributions, voluntary or assessed, to any international organization which makes any change in the P.L.O.'s present status as an observer organization.⁵¹

While initially some countries did not believe that America would make good on its threat, a concerted U.S. diplomatic lobbying campaign succeeded, defeating the PLO at the WHO and stopping Arafat's initiative.⁵²

45. Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 52. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>); Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, Pub. L. 101-246, 104 Stat. 65-66, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §287e note. (<https://www.congress.gov/101/statute/STATUTE-104/STATUTE-104-Pg15.pdf>); Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, Pub. L. 102-138, 105 Stat. 675-676, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §287e note. (<https://www.congress.gov/102/statute/STATUTE-105/STATUTE-105-Pg647.pdf>)

46. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995, Pub. L. 103-236, 108 Stat. 454, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §287e note. (<https://www.congress.gov/103/statute/STATUTE-108/STATUTE-108-Pg382.pdf>)

47. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1996 and 1997, H.R. 1561, 104th Congress (1996), pages 75-76. (<https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hr1561/BILLS-104hr1561enr.pdf>); H.R.1561, 104th Congress (1995-1996), Actions Overview, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/1561/actions?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22foreign+relations+authorization+act%2C+fiscal+years+1996+and+1997%22%7D&r=2&s=9>)

48. Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999, Pub. L. 105-277, div. G, subdiv. B (sec. 2001 et seq.), 112 Stat. 2681-2801, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §2651 note. (<https://www.congress.gov/105/plaws/publ277/PLAW-105publ277.pdf>)

49. John R. Bolton, “The Key to Changing the United Nations System,” *The American Enterprise Institute*, October 28, 2010. (<https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-key-to-changing-the-united-nations-system-2/>)

50. Robert Pear, “Baker Would Ask Cutoff of Funds If U.N. Agencies Upgrade P.L.O.,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1989. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/02/world/baker-would-ask-cutoff-of-funds-if-un-agencies-upgrade-plo.html>)

51. *Ibid.*

52. John Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), Kindle Locations 644-661.

Democratic-controlled Congresses built on the victory by incorporating the administration's threatened funding cutoff into foreign relations authorization acts, making the position permanent U.S. law.⁵³ The law successfully deterred UN bodies from admitting "Palestine" until UNESCO did so in 2011, as discussed above.

PRESSLER AMENDMENT

In 1993, the Democratic-controlled Congress adopted an amendment by Senator Larry Pressler (R-SD) that conditioned payment of 10 percent of U.S. assessed contributions to the UN on the establishment of "an independent [UN] office with responsibilities and powers substantially similar to offices of Inspectors General authorized by the Inspector General Act of 1978."⁵⁴ That year, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright proposed the formation of such an office.⁵⁵ To that end, in 1994, the UNGA created the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), whose head is approved by the secretary-general with the UNGA's consent.⁵⁶

According to Bruce Rashkow, a former lawyer for the State Department and the UN, OIOS would never have been established if not for the withholding threat by Congress.⁵⁷ However, OIOS has struggled to achieve the "operational independence" granted by the UNGA.⁵⁸ While the office has carried out important investigations into corruption and sexual exploitation and abuse, it has been blocked from hiring experienced staff. Moreover, a former head of the OIOS Investigations Division accused the head of OIOS of working with senior UN officials to investigate a whistleblower's leak and otherwise undermining the office to appease the UN Secretariat.⁵⁹ In 2006, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan even prevented the under-secretary-general who ran OIOS from attending a UN Security Council meeting on procurement fraud.⁶⁰ Sadly, as Rashkow observed, "an internally independent office to investigate fraud, abuse, and waste within the organization ... runs counter to the culture and long practice of the U.N."⁶¹

It did not help that Congress, having brought about the creation of OIOS, did not insist upon using its leverage to ensure that the office met Washington's expectations. Congress could have enacted permanent legislative provisions conditioning payment unless OIOS operated with full independence.

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53. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, Pub. L. 101-246, 104 Stat. 70-71, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §287e note. (<https://www.congress.gov/101/statute/STATUTE-104/STATUTE-104-Pg15.pdf>); Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995, Pub. L. 103-236, 108 Stat. 454-455, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §287e note. (<https://www.congress.gov/103/statute/STATUTE-108/STATUTE-108-Pg382.pdf>)

54. Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Pub. L. 103-121, 107 Stat. 1187, codified as amended at 22 U.S.C. §269a note. (<https://www.congress.gov/103/statute/STATUTE-107/STATUTE-107-Pg1153.pdf>); H.R. 2519, S.Amdt. 708, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/amendment/103rd-congress/senate-amendment/708?s=a&t=14>)

55. Marjorie Ann Browne, "United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues," *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 53. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>)

56. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 48/218B, July 29, 1994. (<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n94/333/10/pdf/n9433310.pdf?token=Jr3kgURgMBGidig4Ro&fe=true>)

57. Colum Lynch, "The U.N.'s Investigation Wars," *Foreign Policy*, August 26, 2015. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/26/the-u-n-s-investigation-wars>)

58. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 48/218B, July 29, 1994. (<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n94/333/10/pdf/n9433310.pdf?token=Jr3kgURgMBGidig4Ro&fe=true>)

59. Colum Lynch, "The U.N.'s Investigation Wars," *Foreign Policy*, August 26, 2015. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/26/the-u-n-s-investigation-wars>)

60. John Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), Kindle Locations 4793-4795.

61. Colum Lynch, "The U.N.'s Investigation Wars," *Foreign Policy*, August 26, 2015. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/26/the-u-n-s-investigation-wars>)

HELMS-BIDEN AGREEMENT

By the late 1990s, Washington was \$900 million in arrears to the UN. This included not only the withholdings referenced earlier but also those resulting from legislation prohibiting the United States from paying more than 25 percent of the cost of UN peacekeeping operations — even though its assessment was closer to 30 percent.⁶²

The U.S. government wanted further UN reforms, and the UN wanted payment of the arrears. Congress and the Clinton administration thus negotiated a deal named after two of the leading congressional negotiators, Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Joe Biden (D-DE). The agreement, enacted with large bipartisan majorities in 1999, conditioned payment of arrears on multiple reforms or “substantial progress” toward achieving reform.⁶³

These reforms included limiting the maximum regular budget assessment by the UN for any one member state to 22 percent, eventually lowering the cap to 20 percent; limiting the peacekeeping budget assessment for any one member state to 25 percent; keeping to “zero nominal growth” in the 2000-01 biennial budgets of UN specialized agencies; establishing independent and active inspector-general offices at each specialized agency; providing the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) access to UN financial data; and implementing a UN personnel code of conduct.

Helms-Biden was important UN reform legislation. And because payment of arrears was conditioned on the prescribed reforms, the UNGA adopted most of them. The U.S. contribution to the regular budget was reduced to 22 percent, and the peacekeeping budget assessment fell significantly, hitting a low of just under 26 percent in 2008-09.⁶⁴

However, as with the Kassebaum-Solomon and Pressler amendments, some reforms were not fully achieved because the threat of withholding was not sustained. Once arrears were paid, the UN had less to fear, and it never followed through on reducing the maximum assessment for any one member state for the regular budget to 20 percent, among other reforms.

HENRY J. HYDE UNITED NATIONS REFORM ACT OF 2005

In 2005, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, angered by frequent reports of UN scandals, passed important UN reform legislation. The bill, and opposition to it by Democrats, also marked a sharp divergence in

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62. Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 53. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>)

63. Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2000, Pub. L. 106-113, 113 STAT. 1501A-475-484. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ113/pdf/PLAW-106publ113.pdf>); H.R.3194, 106th Congress (1999-2000), All Actions, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/3194/all-actions?q=%7B%22roll-call-vote%22%3A%22all%22%7D&cr=28&s=2&overview=closed>)

64. Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 15, 2013, page 53. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33611.pdf>); United Nations General Assembly, “Information on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General,” March 1, 2001. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/435152?ln=en>); United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General: Addendum,” December 17, 2003. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/509103?ln=en>); United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General: Addendum,” December 27, 2006. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/590522?ln=en>).

the two parties' views on UN reform. Most Republicans wanted to again make payment of assessed contributions conditional on sweeping changes to the UN's operations. Most of their Democratic counterparts no longer supported mandatory conditioning, claiming it would weaken America's hand at the UN by putting the nation back into arrears.⁶⁵

The Henry J. Hyde United Nations Reform Act of 2005 — named after its sponsor, the chairman of the House International Relations Committee — sought sweeping permanent reforms, instead of the piecemeal, sporadic changes the UN had made under previous congressional pressure. As the committee's report on the legislation stated, "Reform ... should not be a periodic event undertaken because of the threat of financial pressure. Rather, it should be an integral part of the culture of the United Nations."⁶⁶

The bill's central feature was a mandatory withholding of half of the U.S.-assessed contribution to the UN's regular budget until the UN made 39 specific reforms. These included switching the funding source of 18 UN programs from assessed to voluntary contributions to increase the UN's accountability and responsiveness to big donor states; changes to OIOS to make it more independent; the establishment of an ethics office; and the creation of a new UN Human Rights Council with meaningful membership standards.⁶⁷

The bill also sought to require the U.S. executive branch to veto new UN peacekeeping operations until the UN made further reforms, including adopting a "uniform Code of Conduct" for all peacekeeping personnel.⁶⁸

Committee Democrats argued that some of the bill's provisions were too harsh, such as the withholding of assessed contributions even if the UN made most of the required reforms and requiring the veto of any new peacekeeping missions — even urgently needed ones — if certain reforms were not implemented. "The Republican bill has only sticks, no carrots," the Democrats wrote in the bill's committee report.⁶⁹

Interestingly, the main Democratic amendment offered in committee to the Hyde bill preserved the option of withholding half of the U.S. assessed contribution to the UN's regular budget but left it to the secretary of state's discretion.⁷⁰ "Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice must be able to use the financial threat to get the job done in New York, but must not be forced to cut off funds according to some mechanical and automatic withholding formula," said Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA), the ranking Democrat.⁷¹

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65. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, "Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 2745," June 10, 2005, pages 53-55. (<https://www.congress.gov/109/crpt/hrpt120/CRPT-109hrpt120.pdf>)

66. *Ibid.*, page 22

67. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, "Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 2745," June 10, 2005, pages 3, 6-12, 21. (<https://www.congress.gov/109/crpt/hrpt120/CRPT-109hrpt120.pdf>)

68. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, "Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 2745," June 10, 2005, pages 17-18. (<https://www.congress.gov/109/crpt/hrpt120/CRPT-109hrpt120.pdf>)

69. *Ibid.*, pages 54- 55

70. "Markup on H.R. 2745, H.R. 2601, and H. Res. 199," *House International Relations Committee*, June 8-9, 2005, pages 146-147. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109hhrg21698/pdf/CHRG-109hhrg21698.pdf>); U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, "Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 2745," June 10, 2005, page 57. (<https://www.congress.gov/109/crpt/hrpt120/CRPT-109hrpt120.pdf>)

71. "Markup on H.R. 2745, H.R. 2601, and H. Res. 199," *House International Relations Committee*, June 8-9, 2005, page 154. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109hhrg21698/pdf/CHRG-109hhrg21698.pdf>).

The House passed the Hyde legislation in June 2005.⁷² However, the Senate did not consider the bill.⁷³ Moreover, the George W. Bush administration declined to pursue the measure, considering it counterproductive to achieving reform and an excessive interference with the president's authority to conduct foreign policy.⁷⁴ The failure of the Hyde bill thus marked the end of bipartisan consensus to condition UN funding to achieve reform.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S 'NEW ERA OF ENGAGEMENT'

President Barack Obama declared a "new era of engagement" at the UNGA in 2009, an apparent effort to distance himself from past congressional reform efforts.⁷⁵ His administration, like its predecessor, believed in paying assessed contributions to the UN in full, opposing withholdings to achieve reforms. Susan Rice, the administration's first envoy to the UN, suggested that withholding for any reason would violate U.S. treaty obligations.⁷⁶

By the end of 2010, the United States had paid off over a third of the almost \$1.2 billion owed to the UN.⁷⁷ In 2007, the Democratic-controlled Congress lifted the 25 percent cap on the level of assessed peacekeeping budget contributions (imposed by the Helms-Biden agreement), paying 27.1 percent instead.⁷⁸ Congress thus indicated its willingness to pay whatever rate the UN assessed, undermining the peacekeeping budgetary restraint incentivized by the Helms-Biden Act. This payment had been declining and was just under 26 percent in 2008-09 but then started to increase, peaking at 28.57 percent in 2016.⁷⁹

72. Henry J. Hyde United Nations Reform Act of 2005, H. R. 2745, 109th Congress (2005), Roll Call 282. (<https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2005282>)

73. Henry J. Hyde United Nations Reform Act of 2005, H.R. 2745, 109th Congress (2005-2006), All Actions Except Amendments, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/2745/all-actions-without-amendments?s=3&r=1>)

74. U.S. Office of Management and Budget, "Statement of Administration Policy: H.R. 2745 — United Nations Reform Act of 2005," June 16, 2005. (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-administration-policy-hr-2745-united-nations-reform-act-2005>); William Branigin, "House Passes Bill to Cut U.N. Funds in Half," *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2005. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/technology/2005/06/17/house-passes-bill-to-cut-un-funds-in-half/13cc12fb-29df-43eb-9186-50022214bf43/>); "US House Debates UN Reform Bill," *Voice of America*, October 29, 2009. (<https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2005-06-16-voa82-67391377/382794.html>)

75. U.S. President Barack Obama, *Address before the United Nations General Assembly*, September 23, 2009. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-WB-13315>)

76. U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan E. Rice, "A New Course in the World, a New Approach at the UN," *Speech before New York University's Center for Global Affairs and the Center on International Cooperation*, August 12, 2009. (<https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/a-new-course-in-the-world-a-new-approach-at-the-un-aug-12-2009>). In the 1960s, the Soviet Union withheld assessed contributions to the UN but suffered no loss of privileges. In response, U.S. envoy Arthur Goldberg asserted that Washington also reserved the right to withhold contributions, a principle known as the Goldberg Reservation that reflected the bipartisan consensus for decades. See: U.S. Department of State, "Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Posts," August 16, 1965. (<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v33/d365>)

77. "U.S. pays off much of U.N. arrears, now owes \$736 million," *Reuters*, January 25, 2011. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-usa-arrears/u-s-pays-off-much-of-u-n-arrears-now-owes-736-million-idUSTRE70O7DW20110125>)

78. Marjorie Ann Browne and Kennon H. Nakamura, "United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues," *Congressional Research Service*, December 4, 2009, page 15. (https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20091204_RL33611_f45e3f837af3516e0e909c2cf035817cfc3d30b.pdf)

79. United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General," December 17, 2003. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/509103?ln=en>); See also subsequent editions of the UNGA report on implementation of resolutions 55/235 and 55/236, especially the reports from December 27, 2006, (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/580613?ln=en>); December 31, 2009, (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/663590?ln=en>); December 27, 2012, (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/741004?ln=en>); December 28, 2015, (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/816385?ln=en>); and December 24, 2018, (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1657181?ln=en>).

In some instances, the Obama administration did take steps favorable to reform. For one, the administration appointed the capable Joseph M. Torsella to focus on management issues.⁸⁰ Torsella fought for UN budgetary restraint, protesting in 2011, “For a decade now, the United Nations regular budget has grown dramatically, relentlessly, and exponentially.” Torsella also criticized the 2012-13 regular budget, saying it “does not represent a break from ‘business as usual,’ but rather a continuation of it.”⁸¹ However, the administration failed in most of its attempts to cut the UN budget.

The Obama administration also continued and strengthened the UN Transparency and Accountability Initiative (UNTAI), a program that began under the George W. Bush administration. The initiative sought to advance a series of reforms, most notably independent evaluation and ethics functions, “[c]redible whistleblower protections,” and “[t]ransparent financial management.”⁸² The U.S. Agency for International Development reported in 2013 that six major UN organizations and programs had “made progress on major managerial aspects” following the relaunch of UNTAI by the Obama administration.⁸³

These efforts were not enough to satisfy those on the Hill who remained committed, despite the failure of the Hyde bill, to the old approach of conditioning at least some U.S. funding on the UN’s readiness to accept reforms. After the 2010 elections returned a GOP majority to Congress, there would be one last attempt.

THE UNITED NATIONS TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND REFORM ACT OF 2011

In 2011, the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), formerly known as the House International Relations Committee, marked up comprehensive new UN reform legislation. The United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act (UNTARA),⁸⁴ sponsored by committee Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), pushed back against the Obama administration’s unconditional funding approach. (Full disclosure: This author worked for HFAC during Ros-Lehtinen’s chairmanship and drafted parts of UNTARA.) While UNTARA had no chance of overcoming a presidential veto, Ros-Lehtinen believed the legislation would nonetheless advance an alternative policy that could be implemented later and that merely introducing the bill could push the UN toward reform.

Ros-Lehtinen’s legislation went further than the Hyde bill, with proposed conditions on half of the U.S.-assessed contribution to the UN’s regular budget, moving at least 80 percent of the budget to a voluntary funding basis. It also sought to cut off funding to any UN entity that did not provide extensive documentation to the United States, including audits, investigatory reports, financial statements, budgets, and databases containing financial and programmatic information; implement and uphold whistleblower-protection policies; and establish effective ethics offices and independent internal-oversight entities.⁸⁵

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80. “UN Transparency and Accountability Initiative,” U.S. Mission to the United Nations, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://usun.usmission.gov/mission/management-and-reform-section/un-transparency-and-accountability-initiative>)

81. Joseph M. Torsella, “Remarks by Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella, U.S. Representative for Management and Reform to the United Nations, to the Fifth Committee on the UN Budget,” *U.S. Mission to the United Nations*, September 29, 2011. (https://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/66/Statements/000%20Organization%20of%20Work/C5_66_0m_ST_2011_09_29_Org_of_Work_United_States.pdf)

82. “UN Transparency and Accountability Initiative,” U.S. Mission to the United Nations, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://usun.usmission.gov/mission/management-and-reform-section/un-transparency-and-accountability-initiative>)

83. U.S. Agency for International Development, “Foreign Operations: FY 2012 Performance Report, FY 2014 Performance Plan,” April 2, 2013. (https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/FY%202012%20APR%20FY%202014%20APP_FINAL_4-2-2013.pdf)

84. United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act of 2011, H.R. 2829, 112th Congress (2011). (<https://www.congress.gov/112/bills/hr2829/BILLS-112hr2829rh.pdf>)

85. *Ibid.*, pages 11-12, 16-28

UNTARA also sought to prohibit U.S. contributions to, or membership in, the UN Human Rights Council and withheld funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) until both bodies reformed. Like the Hyde bill, Ros-Lehtinen's bill required Washington to veto new UN peacekeeping operations until the establishment and implementation of training in a code of conduct for peacekeeping personnel. However, UNTARA allowed the president to waive that restriction to prevent "widespread loss of human life, genocide, or the endangerment of a vital national security interest of the United States."⁸⁶

As with the Hyde bill, committee Democrats and the executive branch opposed UNTARA.⁸⁷ This time, however, Democrats strongly opposed any conditioning of U.S. contributions to the UN on reforms. "Based on our experience in recent years, I would argue that withholding U.S. dues simply doesn't work," said Ranking Member Howard L. Berman (D-CA).⁸⁸

The House never held a vote on UNTARA, even though the chamber was controlled by Republicans. Later iterations of her bill were not marked up by HFAC, either.⁸⁹

CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT OF 2012

Even though UNTARA made little headway, Congress used appropriations legislation to incentivize UN transparency and accountability. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 was the first to withhold — subject to an executive-branch waiver — 15 percent of the U.S. contribution to international organizations not "taking steps" to make publicly available "regular financial and programmatic audits" and to "implement best practices" to protect whistleblowers.⁹⁰ Appropriations bills in later years included similar, even stricter language.⁹¹

Although multiple UN bodies fail to meet these standards,⁹² the executive branch has only twice used this provision to withhold funds. The Obama administration withheld funding from the World Intellectual Property

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⁸⁶. Ibid, pages 52-54, 108-111, 147-153

⁸⁷. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, "Report Together with Dissenting Views to Accompany H.R. 2829," December 8, 2011, pages 65-69. (<https://www.congress.gov/112/crpt/hrpt323/CRPT-112hrpt323.pdf>); Pete Kasperowics, "Ros-Lehtinen says UN reform bill about reform, not UN-bashing," *The Hill*, September 13, 2011. (<https://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/house/172515-ros-lehtinen-says-un-reform-bill-about-reform-not-un-bashing>)

⁸⁸. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Press Release, "Ranking Member Howard L. Berman's Opening Statement at Hearing, 'Reforming the United Nations: The Future of U.S. Policy,'" April 7, 2011. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190104052935/https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2011/4/ranking-member-howard-l-berman-s-opening-statement-hearing-reforming-united-0>)

⁸⁹. United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act, of 2013, H.R. 3155, 113th Congress (2013-2014), Actions Overview, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/3155>); United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act of 2015, H.R. 3667, 114th Congress (2015-2016), Actions Overview, *Congress.gov*, accessed January 29, 2023. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/3667>)

⁹⁰. Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012, Pub. L. 112-74, 125 Stat. 1240. (<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ74/PLAW-112publ74.pdf>)

⁹¹. For example, see: Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, Pub. L. 113-235, 128 Stat. 2660. (<https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ235/PLAW-113publ235.pdf>)

⁹². Brett D. Schaefer, "The U.S. Should Enforce the Law to Improve U.N. Whistle-blower Protections," *The Heritage Foundation*, April 10, 2017. (<https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/the-us-should-enforce-the-law-improve-un-whistle-blower-protections>)

Organization in 2016, and the Trump administration followed suit the next year.⁹³ WIPO's then director-general, Francis Gurry, had ordered the Swiss police to break into the offices of whistleblowers who had worked for him to collect DNA to prove they wrote anonymous letters about him. However, the U.S. withholding was largely symbolic because WIPO collects almost all its revenue from patent service fees. Still, the organization faced increased public scrutiny for Gurry's misconduct.⁹⁴

TRUMP AND BIDEN: DISRUPTION AND A RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO (2016-2024)

As Donald Trump prepared to assume the presidency, he announced plans to break with traditional U.S. policy, tweeting, "As to the U.N., things will be different after Jan. 20th."⁹⁵ Whereas Congress had spearheaded most UN reform initiatives until then, Trump's policies marked an intensified effort by the executive branch to achieve robust change at the UN.

Trump chose as UN ambassador South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, who wrote in her autobiography that she entered the UN with an "instinct to disrupt." She and Trump wanted to make the institution more effective and "show the American people value for their investment."⁹⁶

In September 2017, during the UNGA's opening week, the United States and 12 other countries released a 10-point Declaration of Support for United Nations Reform. The declaration — which *Politico* rightly called "vague, but sweeping"⁹⁷ — endorsed UN Secretary-General António Guterres's reform agenda, particularly "strengthening the [UN] system's accountability framework through enhancing transparency, strengthening oversight, and aligning authority with responsibility." The statement also included a commitment "to reducing mandate duplication, redundancy, and overlap."⁹⁸ Of the UN's 193 member states, 143 agreed to the declaration.

Trump declared that to regain global trust, the UN "must hold every level of management accountable, protect whistle-blowers and focus on results rather than on process."⁹⁹ Haley called for "a better United Nations ... with the trust and the capability to deliver on its mandate to promote peace, security and human rights."¹⁰⁰

Haley warned in December 2017 that U.S. financial support for the UN should not be "taken for granted."¹⁰¹ She said she would use Trump's proposed cuts to UN peacekeeping funding in the U.S. budget "as leverage" and

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^{93.} George Russell, "US sanctions UN agency under whistle-blower law in unprecedented move," *Fox News*, May 4, 2016. (<https://www.foxnews.com/world/us-sanctions-un-agency-under-whistle-blower-law-in-unprecedented-move>); "WIPO's Gurry Refers to US Congress as a 'Kangaroo Court': Retaliation Against Whistleblowers Continues Unchecked," *Government Accountability Project*, August 8, 2017. (<https://whistleblower.org/uncategorized/wipos-gurry-refers-to-us-congress-as-a-kangaroo-court-retaliation-against-whistleblowers-continues-unchecked>)

^{94.} George Russell, "US sanctions UN agency under whistle-blower law in unprecedented move," *Fox News*, May 4, 2016. (<https://www.foxnews.com/world/us-sanctions-un-agency-under-whistle-blower-law-in-unprecedented-move>)

^{95.} @realDonaldTrump, *Twitter*, December 23, 2016. (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/812390964740427776>)

^{96.} Nikki Haley, *With All Due Respect: Defending America with Grit and Grace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019), pages 91-92.

^{97.} Nahal Toosi, "Trump takes on a new cause: 'Make the United Nations great,'" *Politico*, September 18, 2017. (<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/18/trump-united-nations-2017-make-united-nations-great-242842>)

^{98.} "Declaration of Support for United Nations Reform," September 18, 2017. (<https://usun.usmission.gov/declaration-of-support-for-united-nations-reform>)

^{99.} Nahal Toosi, "Trump takes on a new cause: 'Make the United Nations great,'" *Politico*, September 18, 2017. (<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/18/trump-united-nations-2017-make-united-nations-great-242842>)

^{100.} U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, *Address before a High-Level Event on "Reforming the United Nations: Management, Security, and Development,"* September 18, 2017. (<https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-high-level-event-on-reforming-the-united-nations-management-security-and-development>)

^{101.} Adva Saldinger, "Haley says she will help UN reform, but warns US funding wont be 'taken for granted,'" *Devex*, December 6, 2017. (<https://www.devex.com/news/haley-says-she-will-help-un-reform-but-warns-us-funding-wont-be-taken-for-granted-91701>)

emphasized that the United States would not pay more in assessed contributions for peacekeeping than the 25 percent cap enshrined in U.S. law.¹⁰²

In 2017, the Trump administration pushed for cutting more than \$1 billion from the UN's annual peacekeeping budget and came away with reductions of \$600 million.¹⁰³ Washington also lowered its peacekeeping assessment from 28.46 percent in 2017 to 27.89 percent in 2019.¹⁰⁴

The UN soon changed its peacebuilding and peacekeeping structures. The organization merged its Department of Political Affairs (DPA), which does conflict mediation, and Peacebuilding Support Office to create a Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).¹⁰⁵ It also renamed the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) as the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and tasked it with non-peacekeeping missions in unstable countries, which, at least in theory, could avoid duplicating work previously done by DPKO and DPA.¹⁰⁶ The UN created bodies for Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East to better coordinate peace operations there.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the Trump administration's strategy to achieve systemic UN reform yielded positive and significant, albeit limited, budgetary and structural changes. The United States might have accomplished more if it had the same UN ambassador in place for all four years or if the president had kept the position at the cabinet level after the departure of Ambassador Haley at the end of 2018.¹⁰⁸ The administration also should have built on the "Declaration of Support for United Nations Reform" by urging follow-up declarations committing signatories to more concrete and specific reform measures.

A WIN AND A LOSS: THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION AND WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) oversees international agreements that set shipping rates. These rates, called "terminal dues," aim to give discounts to countries in the developing world. Remarkably, this included China, which is the second-largest economy in the world. Consequently, it can be cheaper to ship a package

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102. Jennifer Peltz, "US: Won't pay over 25 percent of UN peacekeeping anymore," *Associated Press*, March 28, 2018. (<https://apnews.com/general-news-ab175f451c924efdbc438724260980ae>)

103. Michelle Nichols, "U.N. states agree \$7.3 bln peacekeeping budget, U.S. share cut 7.5 pct," *Reuters*, June 29, 2017. (<https://news.yahoo.com/news/u-n-states-agree-7-3-bln-peacekeeping-083105153-business.html>)

104. United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236 Report of the Secretary-General," December 28, 2015. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/816385?ln=en>); United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General," December 24, 2018. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1657181?ln=en>)

105. "UN reform: Two new departments for the peace and security pillar," *Delegate: The UN Intranet-iSeek for Member States*, August 23, 2018. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20230327190840/https://www.un.int/news/un-reform-two-new-departments-peace-and-security-pillar>); Abhik K. Pramanik, "'Making the United Nations Great Again': Bold Reforms Underway," *U.S. Global Leadership Coalition*. (<https://www.usglc.org/blog/making-the-united-nations-great-again-bold-reforms-underway>)

106. "UN reform: Two new departments for the peace and security pillar," *Delegate: The UN Intranet-iSeek for Member States*, August 23, 2018. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20230327190840/https://www.un.int/news/un-reform-two-new-departments-peace-and-security-pillar>); Abhik K. Pramanik, "'Making the United Nations Great Again': Bold Reforms Underway," *U.S. Global Leadership Coalition*, July 27, 2018. (<https://www.usglc.org/blog/making-the-united-nations-great-again-bold-reforms-underway>)

107. Abhik K. Pramanik, "'Making the United Nations Great Again': Bold Reforms Underway," *U.S. Global Leadership Coalition*, July 27, 2018. (<https://www.usglc.org/blog/making-the-united-nations-great-again-bold-reforms-underway>)

108. Amy Lieberman, "What to expect from Kelly Craft's hearing for US ambassador to UN," *Devex*, June 19, 2019. (<https://www.devex.com/news/what-to-expect-from-kelly-craft-s-hearing-for-us-ambassador-to-un-95133>)

from China to the United States than to send the same package within the United States.¹⁰⁹ This put many American businesses at a disadvantage compared with Chinese competitors.¹¹⁰

In September 2018, the administration threatened to leave the UPU in one year and have the United States set its own terminal dues rates if other member states did not agree to renegotiate them.¹¹¹ Some stakeholders worried that if every country set its own rates unilaterally, it would cause chaos in the international postal system.¹¹² However, some critics of Trump's policies, including *The Washington Post* editorial board, supported his UPU threat.¹¹³

Given that Trump had already pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate agreement, he was probably not bluffing about withdrawing from the UPU. Multilateral negotiations came down to the wire, but in September 2019, they resulted in a compromise, and the United States stayed in the UPU.¹¹⁴

As Brett Schaefer of the Heritage Foundation wrote, the American strategy succeeded because:

the United States had a specific goal, communicated it clearly to other governments, and laid the groundwork in advance. Most other nations were convinced that the United States was serious, recognized they were being asked to adopt a change that was targeted and knew that U.S. withdrawal would be more costly than the proposed reform.¹¹⁵

In contrast to the quiet victory at the UPU, Trump's high-profile showdown with the WHO was a debacle. At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, regurgitated

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109. Abigail Abrams, "Trump Is Having His Own Brexit': The Race to Prepare for a Potential U.S. Exit From the World's Mail System," *Time*, September 19, 2019. (<https://time.com/5680413/trump-universal-postal-union>); Eliot Kim, "Withdrawal from the Universal Postal Union: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Lawfare*, October 31, 2018. (<https://www.lawfareblog.com/withdrawal-universal-postal-union-guide-perplexed>)

110. Brett D. Schaefer, "A US Victory at the Universal Postal Union," *The Daily Signal*, September 27, 2019. (<https://www.dailysignal.com/2019/09/27/a-us-victory-at-the-universal-postal-union>)

111. Modernizing the Monetary Reimbursement Model for the Delivery of Goods Through the International Postal System and Enhancing the Security and Safety of International Mail, 83 Federal Register 47791, August 23, 2018, pages 47791-47793. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-09-20/pdf/2018-20667.pdf>); White House Press Secretary, Statement, "Statement from the Press Secretary," October 17, 2018. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190409112515/https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-38>)

112. Abigail Abrams, "Trump Is Having His Own Brexit': The Race to Prepare for a Potential U.S. Exit From the World's Mail System," *Time*, September 19, 2019. (<https://time.com/5680413/trump-universal-postal-union>); Bryce Baschuk, "Trump's Next Trade Feud Has Parcels from China in Its Sights," *Bloomberg*, September 21, 2019. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-21/trump-s-next-trade-feud-has-parcels-from-china-in-its-sights>)

113. Editorial, "Trump made the right call to withdraw from the Universal Postal Union," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2018. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-made-the-right-call-to-withdraw-from-the-universal-postal-union/2018/10/28/7dbdde34-d3cb-11e8-83d6-291fced2ab1_story.html)

114. "US officially revokes intent to withdraw from postal union during Washington D.C. visit of UPU's Director General," *Universal Postal Union*, October 16, 2019. (<https://www.upu.int/en/News/2019/10/US-officially-revokes-intent-to-withdraw-from-postal-union-during-Washington-D-C-visit-of-UPU's-Dir>); Abigail Abrams, "U.S. Avoids Postal 'Brexit' as Universal Postal Union Reaches a Deal," *Time*, September 26, 2019. (<https://time.com/5687134/trump-universal-postal-union-deal>); "Global postal union reaches deal to prevent 'nightmare' of US exit," *Reuters*, September 25, 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/25/un-universal-postal-union-mail-deal-trump>); Nick Cumming-Bruce, "U.S. Will Remain in Postal Treaty After Emergency Talks," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/25/business/universal-postal-union-withdraw.html>); Keith Johnson, "Trump Scores a Big Victory — on Stamps," *Foreign Policy*, September 26, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/26/trump-scores-a-big-victory-on-stamps-postal-union-terminal-dues-china>)

115. Brett D. Schaefer, "What Happened to America's Plan to Reform the United Nations?" *The National Interest*, August 4, 2021. (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-happened-america's-plan-reform-united-nations%C2%A0-191167>)

Chinese talking points about the purportedly natural origins of the virus.¹¹⁶ He thanked Beijing in January 2020 “for its cooperation and transparency”¹¹⁷ and for “setting a new standard for outbreak response.”¹¹⁸ This occurred even as the People’s Republic threatened, disciplined, and disappeared Wuhan whistleblowers;¹¹⁹ delayed reporting the virus to the WHO; lied about its method of transmission; and denied WHO experts access to China (and then to Wuhan specifically) for weeks.¹²⁰ By contrast, Tedros ignored the Taiwanese government’s attempts to supply information to the WHO about the pandemic and refused to allow Taiwan to participate as an observer in the World Health Assembly, claiming falsely that the decision was up to member states.¹²¹ Clearly, a major overhaul would be necessary to restore the WHO’s independence and effectiveness.

Trump announced in April 2020 that he would suspend U.S. contributions to the organization pending a 60-90-day investigation of the WHO’s COVID response.¹²² However, the president was not criticizing the WHO from a position of strength, given that the organization designated the coronavirus as a global health emergency six weeks before Trump declared it a national emergency. Moreover, Trump himself had previously said China was transparent about COVID.¹²³

Weeks later, on May 18, 2020, Trump abruptly wrote to Ghebreyesus that if the WHO did not “commit to major substantive improvements within the next 40 days,” the United States would cut off funding permanently and “reconsider” membership in the organization.¹²⁴ Eleven days after that, the president said the United States would withdraw from the WHO because those changes, which were not specified, had not been made.¹²⁵

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116. Julia Hollingsworth and Yong Xiong, “The truth-tellers,” *CNN*, accessed January 30, 2023. (<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/02/asia/china-wuhan-covid-truth-tellers-intl-hnk-dst>)

117. @DrTedros, *Twitter*, January 23, 2020. (<https://twitter.com/drtedros/status/1220421162251051008>)

118. @DrTedros, *Twitter*, January 30, 2020. (<https://twitter.com/drtedros/status/1222982869871669251>)

119. “Li Wenliang: ‘Wuhan whistleblower’ remembered one year on,” *BBC* (UK), February 6, 2021. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55963896>); Julia Hollingsworth and Yong Xiong, “The truth-tellers,” *CNN*, accessed January 30, 2023. (<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/02/asia/china-wuhan-covid-truth-tellers-intl-hnk-dst>)

120. “WHO’s Tedros ‘very disappointed’ China hasn’t granted entry to coronavirus experts,” *Reuters*, January 5, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/whos-tedros-very-disappointed-china-hasnt-granted-entry-coronavirus-experts-2021-01-05>); Stephanie Nebehay, John Geddie, and Thomas Peter, “WHO team arrives in China’s Wuhan to investigate COVID-19 origins,” *Reuters*, January 14, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-team-arrives-chinas-wuhan-investigate-covid-19-origins-2021-01-14>); Helen Regan and Sandi Sidhu, “WHO team blocked from entering China to study origins of coronavirus,” *CNN*, January 6, 2021. (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/05/china/china-blocks-who-team-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html>)

121. Louise Watt, “Taiwan Says It Tried to Warn the World About Coronavirus. Here’s What It Really Knew and When,” *Time*, May 19, 2020. (<https://time.com/5826025/taiwan-who-trump-coronavirus-covid19>); “US criticizes WHO for ignoring Taiwan virus warnings,” *Agence France-Presse* (France), April 9, 2020. (<https://www.france24.com/en/20200409-us-criticizes-who-for-ignoring-taiwan-virus-warnings>); Brett D. Schaefer, “In Excluding Taiwan, Politics Overrides Health at the World Health Organization,” *The Heritage Foundation*, May 19, 2020. (<https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/excluding-taiwan-politics-overrides-health-the-world-health-organization>); Drew Hinshaw and Lukas I. Alpert, “U.S. Makes Diplomatic Push for Taiwan to Attend WHO Summit,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2020. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-makes-diplomatic-push-for-taiwan-to-attend-who-summit-11588802601>)

122. President Donald J. Trump, *Remarks to the Press*, April 14, 2020. (Archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20201016202847/https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-briefing>)

123. “Trump: U.S. appreciates China’s ‘efforts and transparency’ on coronavirus,” *Reuters*, January 24, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1ZN2IK>)

124. @realDonaldTrump, *Twitter*, May 18, 2020. (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1262577580718395393>)

125. President Donald J. Trump, *Remarks to the Press*, May 30, 2020. (Archived version available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china>)

A year-long waiting period passed before the withdrawal took effect, however. Joe Biden, already his party's de facto nominee for president, made clear he would not carry out the withdrawal.¹²⁶ After assuming office in 2021, the Biden administration pledged to pursue reform by working from within the WHO, but this has yet to yield meaningful results.¹²⁷

In totality, as FDD noted in its January 2021 monograph *From Trump to Biden*:

The Trump administration's efforts to drive reforms and counter adversaries within IOs [international organizations] achieved mixed results – mostly due to a lack of a comprehensive IO strategy and the absence of a high-level lead interagency coordinator for IO elections. Instead, the administration relied on ad hoc campaigns targeting IOs of interest.¹²⁸

BIDEN RETURNS TO THE STATUS QUO

President Joe Biden campaigned on reversing Trump's policies, and he kept his promise at the UN. Instead of leveraging the prospect of restored U.S. contributions and membership to achieve reforms,¹²⁹ he unconditionally resumed funding to key UN agencies.

In addition to staying in the WHO, Biden reversed Trump's withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council, where the worst human rights violators held numerous seats. As in the case of the WHO, the Biden administration argued that full engagement was the best way to encourage reform. Little has changed, however. China, Cuba, Sudan, and other dictatorships still sit on the council, although Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to Moscow's expulsion.

Biden also restored U.S. funding for UNRWA, which Trump had cut because of the agency's refusal to end the use of antisemitic textbooks in UNRWA schools, among other problems.¹³⁰ A funding cut likely would have rendered UNRWA susceptible to pressure from Biden, but he chose to forgo the opportunity.¹³¹

Similarly, the Biden administration asked the Democratic-controlled Congress to enact a waiver allowing Washington to again become a member of UNESCO. In late 2022, Congress acceded, enacting a limited waiver in effect until September 30, 2025. The waiver can only be applied if the president first determines that rejoining UNESCO will "enable the United States to counter Chinese influence or to promote other national interests."

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126. Matthew Lee, "US notifies UN of withdrawal from World Health Organization," *Associated Press*, July 7, 2020. (<https://apnews.com/article/9dc4077f95d183649ca24a32a18abf01>)

127. Craig Singleton, David May, and David Adesnik, "A Better Blueprint for International Organizations: Advancing American Interests on the Global Stage: World Health Organization," Ed. Richard Goldberg, *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 2021, page 12. (<https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/fdd-monograph-a-better-blueprint-for-international-organizations-advancing-american-interests-on-the-global-stage.pdf>)

128. Richard Goldberg, "From Trump to Biden Monograph: International Organizations," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, January 14, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/01/14/international-organizations>)

129. Brett D. Schaefer and Danielle Pletka, "America Should Not Have Rejoined the Flawed United Nations Human Rights Council," *The Heritage Foundation*, February 10, 2021. (<https://www.heritage.org/civil-rights/commentary/america-should-not-have-rejoined-the-flawed-united-nations-human-rights>); Brett D. Schaefer, "A Rash Decision to Rejoin the World Health Organization Before Securing Reforms," *The Heritage Foundation*, January 21, 2021. (<https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/rash-decision-rejoin-the-world-health-organization-securing-reforms>)

130. "UNRWA head: PA textbooks do include anti-Semitism, glorification of terrorism," *Jewish News Syndicate*, September 3, 2021. (<https://www.jns.org/unrwa-head-pa-textbooks-do-include-anti-semitism-glorification-of-terrorism>)

131. James G. Lindsay, "A Missed Opportunity in America's Refunding of UNRWA," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 2, 2021. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/missed-opportunity-americas-refunding-unrwa>)

Further, the waiver would be voided if the Palestinians “obtain the same standing as member states or full membership as a state” in the UN or any of its specialized agencies outside of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.¹³²

The Biden administration exercised this waiver in 2023 and rejoined UNESCO in July without first demanding reforms related to the agency’s bias against Israel.¹³³ The results so far are not positive. In September, UNESCO recognized Jericho — a city prominent in the Book of Judges — as a Palestinian historic site, denying Jewish connections to the city.¹³⁴

The Biden administration’s policy has had a mixed impact on UN spending. The UN’s regular budget for 2022 decreased by about 3.8 percent from the previous year but went up by almost 9 percent in 2023.¹³⁵ The peacekeeping budget fell by about 3.5 percent in 2021-22 but increased by 1.1 percent in 2022-23.¹³⁶ That said, the administration did negotiate a cut in the U.S. assessment, from 27.89 percent in 2020-21 to 26.95 percent in 2022 and 2023.¹³⁷

Whereas the Trump administration issued threats with mixed results, the Biden administration has mistaken engagement for a strategy. Unilaterally surrendering U.S. leverage — providing funding and tacit endorsement without first obtaining reforms — has not yielded positive results.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Historically, reforming the UN depends on leverage. The most potent form of leverage is America’s ability to withhold funding for the UN. To revive the prospects of reform, advocates should pursue the following approach:

- **Build bipartisan support to wield funding as leverage for UN reform.**

- ▷ To begin, build bipartisan support for withholding U.S. contributions from the worst-performing UN bodies on a case-by-case basis.
- ▷ If there is no improvement, build support for withdrawal from the worst-performing UN bodies. A credible threat of withdrawal may be sufficient to spur the desired change.
- ▷ Congress has passed comprehensive UN reform legislation in the past. It could resume this comprehensive approach or begin with piecemeal reforms if that is more viable.

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132. Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. 117-328, 136 Stat. 5049. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-117publ328/pdf/PLAW-117publ328.pdf>)

133. UNESCO, Press Release, “The United States becomes the 194th Member State of UNESCO,” July 11, 2023. (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/united-states-becomes-194th-member-state-unesco>)

134. “UNESCO votes to list ruins near ancient Jericho as a World Heritage Site in Palestine,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), September 17, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-committee-votes-to-list-ancient-jericho-as-a-world-heritage-site-in-palestine>)

135. United Nations, Meeting Coverage, “Fifth Committee Approves Secretary-General’s Proposed \$3.12 Billion Programme Budget for 2022, Concluding Main Part of Seventy-Sixth Session,” December 23, 2021. (<https://press.un.org/en/2021/gaab4378.doc.htm>); United Nations, Meeting Coverage, “Fifth Committee Approves \$3.4 Billion Programme Budget for 2023, Permanent Shift from Biennial to Annual Cycle, Concluding Main Part of Seventy-Seventh Session,” December 30, 2022. (<https://press.un.org/en/2022/gaab4414.doc.htm>)

136. Daniel Forti, “The 2022 UN Peacekeeping Budget: Signs of Progress or a Fleeting Moment of Consensus?” *International Peace Institute Global Observatory*, July 20, 2022. (<https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/07/2022-un-peacekeeping-budget>)

137. United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236: Report of the Secretary-General,” December 24, 2018. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1657181?ln=en>) United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 76/239, December 24, 2021. (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3953673?ln=en>); U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Press Release, “Fact Sheet: Restoring America’s Leadership at the United Nations in President Biden’s First Year,” January 20, 2022. (<https://usun.usmission.gov/fact-sheet-restoring-americas-leadership-at-the-united-nations-in-president-bidens-first-year>)

- **Build international support for UN reform among U.S. allies and partners.**
 - ▷ Urge allies and partners to join the United States in conditioning financial support for the UN on tangible, specific reforms.
 - ▷ As appropriate, wield foreign assistance and other incentives to press American partners to support UN reforms.
 - ▷ Focus on building support in the UK and in Eastern and Central Europe, where governments are less bound to unconditional engagement with the UN.

- **Strengthen America’s presence at the UN.**
 - ▷ Maintain the cabinet-level status of the U.S. ambassador to the UN and ensure this person sits on the National Security Council’s Principals Committee.
 - ▷ Nominate a U.S. envoy with the expectation that the nominee will serve at least four years.
 - ▷ Advocate relentlessly for the election or placement of Americans to key UN positions, especially in secretariats at UN agencies, in order to pursue U.S. interests.
 - ▷ Increase by at least 50 percent the number of U.S.-sponsored Junior Professional Officer slots in the UN in order to pursue U.S. interests.¹³⁸

- **Strengthen accountability and oversight mechanisms.**
 - ▷ Mandate an annual executive branch review of the efficiency and effectiveness of each UN entity of which the United States is a member. The report should also assess the value to the United States of membership in each body.
 - ▷ Resume and make permanent the U.S. policy of withholding 15 percent of the U.S. contribution to any UN entity that does not make itself fully transparent and accountable to the United States and the public.¹³⁹
 - ▷ Withhold 10 percent of U.S. contributions to the UN regular budget until OIOS, the UN’s internal investigative body, is made fully independent of the Secretariat and the other bodies it investigates.
 - ▷ Seek out and protect UN whistleblowers, who have often faced retaliation for exposing misconduct.
 - ▷ Congress should hold multiple oversight hearings each year featuring testimony from both whistleblowers and independent experts.
 - ▷ The U.S. Government Accountability Organization and similar bodies should investigate waste, fraud, abuse, and other misconduct at the UN.

- **Negotiate changes to UN funding and budgetary processes.**
 - ▷ Top contributors should have a proportionately greater say in budgetary matters. Accordingly, the United States should propose a weighted voting system for budgetary questions.
 - ▷ One current proposal is to adopt a rule requiring budgetary questions to be approved by countries whose aggregate contributions make up at least two-thirds of the budget as well as two-thirds of UNGA member states.¹⁴⁰

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138. There is a provision to this effect in the United Nations Transparency and Accountability Act of 2021, H.R. 4775, 117th Congress (2021). (<https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr4775/BILLS-117hr4775ih.pdf>)

139. The United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act of 2011 proposed specific standards for transparency and accountability. United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act of 2011, H.R. 2829, 112th Congress (2011), pages 16-28. (<https://www.congress.gov/112/bills/hr2829/BILLS-112hr2829rh.pdf>). See also: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. 117-328, page 612. (<https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr2617/BILLS-117hr2617enr.pdf>).

140. Brett D. Schaefer, “The Window of Opportunity to Overhaul the U.N. Scale of Assessments Is Closing,” *The Heritage Foundation*, June 18, 2012. (<https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/the-window-opportunity-overhaul-the-un-scale-assessments-closing>)

- ▷ Consider legislation withholding 25 percent of the U.S. contribution to the UN regular budget if the UN does not adopt some form of a weighted-voting system on budgetary questions within five years.
- ▷ Raise the minimum a member state must contribute to the UN's regular budget. States should contribute at least 0.01 percent of the regular budget—roughly \$340,000 per year — as they did until 1998 when the requirement fell to 0.001 percent.¹⁴¹
- ▷ Return to the Helms-Biden position of limiting peacekeeping assessments on the United States to 25 percent of the total cost. If the assessment exceeds 25 percent, the United States should not pay the amount above the cap.
- ▷ Be cautious with any proposal for a shift to greater voluntary funding in place of mandatory contributions. Voluntary funding can incentivize efficiency but also provides opportunities for autocratic regimes to buy influence at the UN.

- **Push for reform at UN human rights bodies.**

- ▷ Work with allies to ensure the UNHRC removes Agenda Item 7, which singles out Israel. No country should be immune from scrutiny, but the council must not serve as an instrument of the campaign to delegitimize the Jewish state.
- ▷ Set a 2026 deadline for UNHRC structural reforms. The UNGA is presently conducting a review of the UNHRC that started in 2021 and ends in 2026. Two years is ample time to approve major reforms, which should include ending secret ballot voting for UNHRC elections.
- ▷ In addition, a two-thirds vote — instead of a simple majority — of UNGA member states should be required for membership, and a simple majority — instead of two-thirds — to suspend an existing member.
- ▷ Pass legislation withholding a portion of the U.S. contribution to the UNHRC in order to create leverage for reform.
- ▷ Create a new human rights forum composed solely of free democratic member states. Competition may spur reform within UNHRC. Congress could pass legislation authorizing the executive branch to work with U.S. allies to found such a forum.

Conditioning U.S. support for the UN on real reforms will help the organization better achieve its founding purposes. And a UN that accomplishes that is a UN that the American people and their representatives will support, regardless of party. However, if the organization fails to reform, it will never sustain continued U.S. support. Rather, America's UN policy will continue to shift dramatically depending on party control of the White House and Congress. Such instability is undesirable and unnecessary. It should be replaced with a bipartisan consensus that focuses on rewarding the UN for results and maximizing U.S. taxpayer dollars.

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141. Ibid.

Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)

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Every year, the U.S. Congress appropriates billions of dollars to the United Nations, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, and multilateral development banks. These contributions are often provided with little or no U.S. oversight and without a comprehensive strategy to advance U.S. interests. FDD's International Organizations Program leverages FDD's regional and subject matter expertise within its centers on American power to identify ways the United States can more strategically employ its resources.

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Foreword Biographies

Former U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) served for almost three decades as a member of Congress, representing diverse areas in South Florida, where she was the chairwoman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Throughout her career, she has been an outspoken advocate for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

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