

BACKGROUND

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The U.S. Must Improve Tracking of Its Contributions to the U.N. and Other International Organizations

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Abstract

Each year, the United States provides billions of dollars in taxpayer funds to the United Nations and other international organizations. Because these funds come from multiple U.S. government departments and agencies, and are dispersed in different budget cycles, the total annual amounts are difficult to track, which has resulted in inconsistent reporting. To address this issue, Congress mandated in 2016 that the Office of Management and Budget report annually to Congress on such U.S. contributions. While this requirement has greatly improved transparency of, and accountability for, U.S. contributions, Congress can and should strengthen reporting requirements further. This Heritage Foundation Backgrounder details additional reforms.

Each year, the United States provides billions of dollars in taxpayer funds to the United Nations and other international organizations. Because these funds come from multiple U.S. government departments and agencies, the total annual amounts are difficult to track, which has resulted in inconsistent and inaccurate reporting. To address this issue, Congress mandated in 2016 that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) report annually to Congress on “all assessed and voluntary contributions with a value greater than \$100,000, including in-kind, of the United States Government to the United Nations and its affiliated agencies and related bodies during the previous fiscal year.”¹

This requirement greatly improves transparency of, and accountability for, U.S. contributions, but Congress could strengthen it. Specifically, Congress should:

KEY POINTS

- The United States has been the largest financial supporter of the United Nations since its founding in 1945.
- The U.S. should be well versed in accounting for these contributions. However, it is surprisingly complex due to the number, and disparate nature, of organizations, multiple U.S. funding streams, and different budget cycles and funding types.
- Congress and the Administration, as stewards of taxpayer dollars, have a responsibility to accurately track and report on U.S. contributions to the U.N. system and other international organizations.
- Congress should improve the accuracy and transparency of these contributions by reforming current reporting requirements, and requiring the State Department to conduct, and make publicly available, a cost-benefit analysis of U.S. contributions to all international organizations.
- The U.S. must ensure that it is prioritizing its funds according to U.S. interests and that U.S. taxpayers get real value for their money.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3394>

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Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

- **Expand the OMB report on contributions to the U.N. system** to include contributions to all international organizations. Doing so would incorporate the information included in the State Department’s annual report on contributions to international organizations, so Congress should eliminate that report. However, since tracking these contributions requires dedicated staff, and the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are the source of most contributions, the State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs should be directed to assist in compiling the expanded OMB report.
- **Require the OMB report to distinguish in the summary tables** between contributions to non-U.N. international organizations and contributions to the U.N. and its specialized agencies, funds, programs, and other affiliated or related bodies.
- **Require all parts of the U.S. government to notify the OMB and the Bureau of International Organization Affairs of any contribution to any international organization.** Ideally, Congress should require these notifications. However, even lacking such a statutory mandate, an OMB request encourages more thorough reporting than a request from the State Department.
- **Instruct the Department of State to publicly list all international organizations** and define which characteristics lead the U.S. to consider an international organization to be part of the U.N. system or otherwise affiliated or related to the U.N. system.
- **Instruct the Department of State to conduct an analysis of, and publicly report on, U.S. participation in all international organizations** to identify those most and least vital to U.S. interests and providing the most and least value

for money. Congress should require the report to list international organizations in quintiles to avoid an “every organization is vital” conclusion.

These changes would reduce duplication in reporting requirements, maintain OMB authority to require all parts of the U.S. government to report contributions to international organizations, enhance speed and accuracy of tracking such contributions, and provide a national interest basis for prioritizing U.S. funding among international organizations.

Challenges to Compiling Accurate Funding Data

Having sound, complete data on U.S. contributions to international organizations seems like it would be a straightforward matter. The United States has been the largest financial supporter of the United Nations since its founding in 1945, and has provided financial support to other international organizations dating back to the 1800s. With that level of experience, America should be well versed in accounting for these contributions. However, it is surprisingly complex due to the number and disparate nature of organizations, multiple U.S. funding streams, and different budget cycles and funding types.

Myriad Organizations. According to the latest report, the U.S. contributed more than \$12.1 billion in funding to 194 international organizations, funds, treaty bodies, councils, groups, bureaus, centers, commissions, and peacekeeping operations in fiscal year (FY) 2017.² The vast majority of this funding (approximately \$10.5 billion) was distributed to the U.N. and over 60 U.N. specialized agencies, peacekeeping operations, funds, programs, treaty bodies, or other entities related to, or affiliated with, the U.N. The remaining international organizations receiving U.S. funding, nearly 130 in total, are incredibly varied, and include:

- Commodity-focused entities, such as the International Coffee Organization, the International Cotton Advisory Committee, and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center;

1. Department of State Authorities Act, Fiscal Year 2017, Section 312, Public Law 114-323, December 16, 2016, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1635/text> (accessed February 27, 2019).

2. U.S. Department of State, “Contributions to International Organizations: Fiscal Year 2017,” Sixty-Sixth Annual Report to Congress, <https://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/2017/c80494.htm> (accessed February 27, 2019).

- Large non-U.N. international organizations focused on humanitarian relief, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), or development, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), or law enforcement, such as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL);
- Regional governance bodies, such as the African Union and the Council of Europe;
- Regional international organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC);
- Regional cooperative treaties focused on fisheries or setting policy for the Antarctic;
- Security alliances, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and
- Small non-U.N. scientific or technical organizations, such as the International Bureau of Weights and Measures and the International Union of Crystallography.

Tracking U.S. funding and participation across this disparate landscape is time-consuming and tedious, especially for the more obscure organizations receiving relatively small contributions. It is far from clear that the State Department report, even listing 194 international organizations, captures all contributions. To give two examples: The FY 2008 Report on Contributions to International Organizations included contributions to (1) the Permanent Engineering Board of the Columbia River Treaty and (2) the World Road Association.³ The U.S. continues to contribute to these organizations, but the FY 2017 report does not include U.S. funding to them.

Multiple U.S. Funding Streams. These inconsistencies are in part because U.S. contributions to international organizations originate from many parts of the U.S. government. Most U.S. contributions originate in the State Department and USAID. For FY 2017, for instance, the State Department and USAID accounted for over 90 percent of all U.S. contributions to international organizations listed in the report. However, other parts of the U.S. government contributed nearly a billion in U.S. taxpayer dollars to international organizations. Specifically, the FY 2017 Report on Contributions to International Organizations listed 21 U.S. government agencies that contributed to international organizations. Some of these contributions are large and expected, such as the Department of Defense contributing \$499 million to NATO. Others, however, are relatively small and less intuitive, like the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Endowment for the Arts contributing, collectively, \$12.6 million to 22 international organizations.

Different Budget Cycles and Funding Types. Each international organization has unique features, including its mission and membership, which distinguish it from other international organizations. One frequent area of difference is budget cycles. While many international organizations operate on a calendar year for budget purposes, some international organizations do not. For instance, the U.N. peacekeeping budget extends from July to June, and the United Nations regular budget operates on a two-year (biennial) budget that is adjusted mid-cycle.⁴ Further muddying the process is that the U.S. uses a fiscal year that starts in October and ends in September the following calendar year. This complicates the process of tracking funds in terms of budget cycles—especially if the U.S. appropriates funds in short-term continuing resolutions as has occurred with relative frequency in recent years—since the U.S. provides funding to most international organizations at the end of the calendar year.⁵

3. U.S. Department of State, "Contributions to International Organizations: Fiscal Year 2008," Fifty-Seventh Annual Report to Congress, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/239023.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2019).

4. The U.N. regular budget will shift to an annual, calendar-year budget starting in 2020.

5. Starting in 1982, the U.S. moved payment to the U.N. and other international organizations from one budget cycle to the next. Prior to that decision, the U.S. had paid funds to the U.N. and other international organizations in January. The practical impact was to realize a one-time budget savings by shifting payments nine months from the beginning of the calendar year to the end of the calendar year. Although the U.S. continued to meet its financial obligations under this arrangement, it created financial stress on the organizations that had to wait until the end of their budget cycle to receive funding from the U.S. See Academy Council on the United Nations System, "Financing the United Nations," June 2012, p. 46, endnote 3, https://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Financing_the_United_Nations.pdf (accessed February 27, 2019).

In addition, there is no uniform funding arrangement for international organizations. Some international organizations are funded through mandatory dues (assessments) paid by member states. For instance, in 2019 the U.S. is assessed 22 percent of the U.N. regular budget and 27.8912 percent of the U.N. peacekeeping budget.⁶ In dollar terms, this works out to \$639 million for the U.N. regular budget and more than \$1.866 billion for the U.N. peacekeeping budget in 2019.⁷

Even within the U.N. system, however, funding mechanisms vary widely. Some U.N. organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization,⁸ base their rate of assessment on the U.N. regular budget to fund their core expenditures even though they receive significant voluntary contributions. By contrast, the International Maritime Organization bases its assessment on economic factors and merchant fleet tonnage, which resulted in a relatively low U.S. assessment of 2.76 percent in 2017.⁹ As another example, the World Intellectual Property Organization receives only about 4 percent of its income from member states and nearly 95 percent from fees and services.¹⁰

Other organizations rely on voluntary contributions from member states or nongovernmental organizations. U.N. funds and programs rely primarily on voluntary contributions from member states and the private sector. Some, however, like the United Nations Environment Program, also receive assessed funding indirectly through the U.N. regular budget.

In addition, the U.S. contributes hundreds of millions of dollars to other organizations outside the U.N. system each year whose funding mechanisms are equally disparate. For instance, the member states fund NATO through assessed contributions according to a cost-share formula based on gross national income (GNI) and voluntary contributions of troops and equipment to military operations. The Organization of American States also has an assessment formula based on GNI adjusted for debt and low per capita income, under which the U.S. is charged 59.47 percent, but receives voluntary funding as well. Other organizations, like the International Coffee Organization, allocated expenses based on a country's proportion of the amount of coffee exports or imports.¹¹

Gaps Revealed

The complexities listed above illustrate why reporting on U.S. contributions to the U.N. system, much less to all international organizations, is a challenging endeavor and why different sources and reports yield different results. Chart 1 below illustrates the significant variance in funding data between U.S. reports and U.N. sources.

The United Nations Chief Executives Board (UNCEB) publishes annual revenue statistics for the U.N. system.¹² The UNCEB data is often billions of dollars higher than the funding data reported to Congress by the OMB and the Department of State. Some variance is natural because the U.N. data is on

6. Report of the Secretary-General, "Scale of Assessments for the Apportionment of the Expenses of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Implementation of General Assembly Resolutions 55/235 and 55/236," A/73/350/Add.1, December 24, 2018, <http://undocs.org/en/A/73/350/Add.1> (accessed February 27, 2019).
7. The regular budget amount is half of the biennial budget for 2018 and 2019 as adjusted mid-biennium in December 2018. The peacekeeping budget amount is the approved resources for July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2019. United Nations General Assembly, "Approved Resources for Peacekeeping Operations for the Period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019," A/C.5/72/25, July 5, 2018, <http://undocs.org/A/c.5/72/25> (accessed February 27, 2019), and United Nations General Assembly, "Programme Budget for the Biennium 2018-2019," A/RES/73/280 A-C, January 7, 2019, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/280%20A (accessed February 27, 2019).
8. Food and Agriculture Organization, "Scale of Contributions 2018-2019," Finance Committee, Hundred and Sixty-Sixth Session, Rome, March 27-31, 2017, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ms516e.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2019).
9. International Maritime Organization, "Financial Report and Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2017," Report of the External Auditors, p. 54, <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Documents/Financial%20Statements/IMO%20Financial%20Statements%202017.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2019).
10. World Intellectual Property Organization, "Program and Budget for the 2018/19 Biennium," p. 8, https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/about-wipo/en/budget/pdf/budget_2018_2019.pdf (accessed February 27, 2019).
11. International Coffee Organization, "Frequently Asked Questions: Where Does the Money Come From?" http://www.ico.org/show_faq.asp?show=7 (accessed February 27, 2019).
12. The United Nations Chief Executives Board is the highest level coordination forum in the United Nations system comprised of the "31 Executive Heads of the United Nations and its Funds and Programmes, the Specialized Agencies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions (The World Bank and IMF), and Related Organizations—the WTO, the UNOPS and the IAEA." United Nations Chief Executives Board, "About," <https://www.unsystem.org/content/about> (accessed February 27, 2019).

CHART 1

U.S. Funding of the U.N. System and International Organizations: Inconsistent Data

Year	UNITED NATIONS CHIEF EXECUTIVES BOARD			REPORTS TO CONGRESS		
	Total Revenue for the U.N. System	Total Revenue from the United States*	United States Share of U.N. Revenue	Fiscal Year	U.S. Contributions to International Organizations	U.S. Contributions to the U.N. System
2010	\$39,526,833,430	\$7,075,888,246	17.9%	2010	\$8,518,300,409	\$7,691,822,000
2011	\$39,509,014,336	\$6,176,742,945	15.6%	2011	\$5,372,801,191	\$4,715,922,111
2012	\$42,323,684,975	\$7,554,421,789	17.8%	2012	\$7,473,284,288	\$6,716,965,814
2013	\$44,638,863,032	\$7,680,181,185	17.2%	2013	\$6,741,127,985	\$5,999,534,918
2014	\$48,079,838,381	\$10,066,592,972	20.9%	2014	\$7,360,833,363	\$7,942,662,070
2015	\$47,979,602,491	\$9,921,344,448	20.7%	2015	\$10,821,521,001	\$8,783,808,135
2016	\$49,333,227,820	\$9,718,025,938	19.7%	2016	\$10,487,783,062	\$8,670,580,612
2017	\$53,199,702,441	\$10,472,199,929	19.7%	2017	\$12,124,205,262	\$10,490,667,845
Total	\$364,590,766,906	\$68,665,397,452	18.8%		\$68,899,856,561	\$61,011,963,505

* UNCEB did not include peacekeeping assessments in revenue from governments until 2013, so “Total Revenue from the United States” adds peacekeeping assessments from “United States Contributions to International Organizations” for FY 2010, FY 2011, and FY 2012 as a proxy.

NOTES:

Data on U.S. contributions to the United Nations System for FY 2017 and FY 2011–2013 compiled by the author using funding information provided in U.S. Department of State annual reports on “United States Contributions to International Organizations.” Determination of which organizations are part of the U.N. system is based on the table of U.N. organizations in Office of Management and Budget, “Report to Congress of United States Contributions to International Organizations for Fiscal Year 2014,” on pages 35–37. “U.S. Contributions to the UN System” does not include contributions to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) even though the UNCEB includes those organizations as part of the U.N. system for the purposes of calculating revenue. Data on U.S. contributions to the United Nations System for FY 2014–16 and FY 2010 as reported by the Office of Management and Budget to Congress.

SOURCES:

United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, “Total Revenue,” <https://www.unsystem.org/content/FS-K00-02#page-title> (accessed February 22, 2019); United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, “Total Revenue by Government Donor,” <https://www.unsystem.org/content/FS-D00-02> (accessed February 22, 2019); U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Contributions to International Organizations,” Congressional Reports, <https://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/> (accessed February 22, 2019); Office of Management and Budget, “Report to Congress of United States Contributions to International Organizations For Fiscal Year 2014,” July 31, 2016, pp. 35–37, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/IAD/MASTER%20Sec%20312%20OMB%20Report_final.pdf (accessed February 22, 2019); and Office of Management and Budget, “Annual Report on United States Contributions to the United Nations: FY2010 US Contributions to the United Nations System,” June 6, 2011, p. 2, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/legislative_reports/us_contributions_to_the_un_06062011.pdf (accessed February 22, 2019).

a calendar-year schedule, while the U.S. reports are on a fiscal year schedule. However, when the multi-year U.N. total is higher by \$7.65 billion, it indicates that at least one source is significantly inaccurate.¹³

The variance between data reported by the State Department and similar reports compiled by the OMB highlights another pattern: Reported funding to international organizations is generally less when the State Department compiles the report than when the OMB compiles the report. FY 2014 is illustrative because the State Department report on Contributions to International Organizations, compiled shortly after the end of that fiscal year, was nearly \$600 million less than the OMB report on the subset (a smaller number of international organizations) of U.S. contributions to the U.N. system compiled in 2017 for FY 2014. This happens, in large part, because while most U.S. contributions to the U.N. system come from the State Department and USAID, millions of dollars also flow from other parts of the federal government, and the State Department lacks the authority to require other agencies to provide full data in a timely manner.¹⁴

In 2016, Congress addressed this problem by requiring the OMB to report annually to Congress on “all assessed and voluntary contributions with a value greater than \$100,000, including in-kind, of the United States Government to the United Nations and its affiliated agencies and related bodies during the previous fiscal year.”¹⁵ The first report compiled by the OMB, submitted in 2017, covered FY 2014,¹⁶ and included summary tables of U.S. contributions to the

U.N. and its affiliated agencies and related bodies for FY 2015 and FY 2016. However, the report deferred to State Department reports on Contributions to International Organizations for specific details for FY 2015 and FY 2016.

While the 2016 law resulted in more detailed and comprehensive reports on U.S. contributions to the United Nations system for FY 2014 to FY 2017, some gaps remain:

- The legislation requires the report to include “all assessed and voluntary contributions with a value greater than \$100,000.” However, some organizations receive less than this amount and might be excluded if this limit is interpreted strictly.
- As noted in the FY 2017 Report on Contributions to International Organizations, “Not all Executive Branch agencies provided information for inclusion in the report.”¹⁷ Thus, relying on the State Department report for a detailed breakdown of U.S. contributions to the U.N. system might result in incomplete information. Requiring the OMB to report on all contributions to all international organizations would improve reporting by other parts of the U.S. government.
- The report does not include U.S. contributions to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the regional development banks because the Department of the Treasury submits them to Congress in a separate report. They should be included

13. Contributing to, but not fully explaining, the discrepancy is the fact that the UNCEB and the U.S. do not agree on which organizations are part of the U.N. system. For instance, the UNCEB includes the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and included those organizations in its calculations for determining total U.N. revenue even though PAHO is a separate regional international organization founded before the World Health Organization, and the IOM did not officially join the U.N. system until 2016. Total U.S. contributions to those organizations from FY 2010 to FY 2017 totaled \$2.73 billion. Adding these contributions to “U.S. Contributions to the U.N. System” narrows the gap between U.S. contributions as calculated by the U.S. versus those calculated by the U.N. to \$4.68 billion.

14. For a discussion of this issue and a brief history of congressional reporting requirements on U.S. contributions to the United Nations system, see Brett D. Schaefer, “Congress Should Renew the Report Requirement on U.S. Contributions to the U.N. and Reverse Record-Setting Contributions to the U.N.” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3324, July 22, 2011, http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/wm3324.pdf, and Brett D. Schaefer, “Congress Must Not Drop the Ball on Reporting US Contributions to the UN,” *The Daily Signal*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2017/11/03/dropping-the-ball-on-reporting-u-s-contributions-to-u-n-system/>.

15. Department of State Authorities Act, Fiscal Year 2017, Public Law No. 114-323, Section 312.

16. Office of Management and Budget, “Report to Congress of United States Contributions to International Organizations for Fiscal Year 2014,” September 19, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/IAD/MASTER%20Sec%20312%20OMB%20Report_final.pdf (accessed February 27, 2019).

17. U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Contributions to International Organizations: Fiscal Year 2017,” <https://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/2017/c80494.htm> (accessed February 28, 2019).

in the report for the sake of completeness, even if in a separate category.

- There exists no definitive definition of a U.N.-affiliated agency or related body, and it is sometimes unclear when organizations fit into this category. For instance, some may disagree with the decision by the OMB to list the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as U.N.-affiliated agencies and related bodies, even though the WTO is a UNCEB member,¹⁸ and the UNCEB lists the OPCW and UNFCCC among “Other UN System Organizations and Entities.”¹⁹

Fixing the Flaws

Although the 2016 law greatly improved transparency and accountability of U.S. contributions to the U.N. system, Congress could strengthen it. Specifically, Congress should:

- **Expand the OMB report on contributions to the U.N. system to include contributions to all international organizations.** Doing so would incorporate the information in the State Department’s annual report on contributions to international organizations and, therefore, Congress should eliminate that report. Congressional oversight could be adequately served provided that: (1) The OMB remains the target of the reporting requirement to increase incentives for other parts of the executive branch to submit information for the report, and (2) that the report instructs the OMB to report contributions to *all* international organizations, including

the U.N. and U.N.-affiliated and related organizations.²⁰ Congress should specify that the report must include *all* contributions, identify them as assessed, voluntary, or in-kind contributions, and, for contributions over \$100,000, include a brief description of their purpose.²¹ However, since tracking these contributions requires dedicated staff, and the State Department and USAID are the source of most contributions, the State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs should be directed to assist in compiling the expanded OMB report.

- **Require the report to identify separately contributions to the U.N. and its specialized agencies, funds, programs, and other affiliated or related bodies and contributions to non-U.N. international organizations.** The United Nations and its affiliated or related organizations are a subset of all international organizations. Based on the reporting requirements, Congress wants to know the total amount that the U.S. is contributing to international organizations, how much the U.S. is contributing to international organizations affiliated with the U.N., how much the U.S. is providing to each individual organization, the source of that funding, and whether that funding is assessed, voluntary, or in-kind. This separation can be accomplished if the 2017 Contributions to International Organizations report slightly alters its presentation to separate U.N.-affiliated and related organizations from non-U.N. international organizations in the summary tables, and lists voluntary, assessed, and in-kind contributions in separate columns. In addition, for those international organizations that have assessed contributions, the report should list the U.S. assessment rate.

18. United Nations Chief Executives Board, “Member Organizations,” <http://www.unsystem.org/content/member-organizations> (accessed February 27, 2019).

19. United Nations Chief Executives Board, “Directory of United Nations System Organizations: Other UN System Organizations and Entities,” <http://www.unsystem.org/more-entities> (accessed February 27, 2019).

20. Public Law 114-323 requires the OMB to report to Congress on “all assessed and voluntary contributions with a value greater than \$100,000, including in-kind, of the United States Government to the United Nations and its affiliated agencies and related bodies during the previous fiscal year.” The 2017 Contributions to International Organizations report lists over three dozen international organizations that received less than \$100,000 from the U.S. government. In theory, these contributions could be excluded if the \$100,000 threshold is maintained. Thus, the combined report, like the report on U.S. Contributions to International Organizations, should require reporting *all* contributions as required in Public Law 81-806 Section 2.

21. An example of an in-kind contribution that is rarely included in the current report is airlift and other support for U.N. peacekeeping operations provided by the Department of Defense.

- **Require all parts of the U.S. government to notify the OMB and the State Department Bureau of International Organization Affairs of all contributions to any international organization.** The 2016 reporting requirement partially addressed the problem that the State Department lacks authority to compel reporting by other parts of the U.S. government on contributions to international organizations by requiring the OMB to submit a report to Congress on contributions to the U.N. system. Even though the OMB can elicit more thorough reporting, some inconsistencies continue. Ideally, Congress should require these notifications and specify that they include a brief summary of the purpose of the contribution; the amount or value of the contribution; the recipient entity; and whether it was an assessed, voluntary, or in-kind contribution.
- **Direct the Department of State to publicly list all international organizations in which the U.S. participates or contributes funding, and define which characteristics lead the U.S. to consider an international organization to be part of the U.N. system or otherwise affiliated with, or related to, the U.N. system.** The list of international organizations should include all international organizations listed in previous reports to Congress by the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the OMB, and should be supplemented by an OMB inquiry to all executive branch departments and agencies. Although determining whether an international organization is part of the U.N. system or affiliated with the U.N. may seem straightforward, there have been disputes in the past. Specifically, U.S. law prohibits any voluntary or assessed contribution “to any affiliated organization of the United Nations which grants full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood.”²² The U.S. does not recognize a Palestinian state, but “Palestine” is now a full member of a number of international organizations, including the UNFCCC. The Obama Administration argued that

the UNFCCC was not a U.N.-affiliated organization, even though the UNCEB lists the UNFCCC among “Other UN System Organizations and Entities”²³ and includes contributions to it among U.N. system revenues. By contrast, however, the 2017 OMB report to Congress included the UNFCCC among its list of U.N. organizations. Establishing objective standards under which the U.S. would consider international organizations part of the U.N. system or affiliated with the U.N. would constrain the subjectivity of those judgments.

- **Instruct the Department of State to conduct an analysis of, and publicly report on, how U.S. interests are served through U.S. participation in each international organization.** The purpose of the report would be to identify the organizations most, and least, vital to U.S. interests, and which provide the most, and least, value for money. This report would be useful for the appropriations process and in ascertaining the benefit versus cost of U.S. membership in individual organizations. Congress should require the report to list international organizations in quintiles ranging from most important to U.S. interests to those least important to U.S. interests to avoid an “every organization is vital” conclusion. Because U.S. membership does not vary significantly from year to year, the report need not be annual, but should be conducted at least once every four years to ensure that each Administration gives the matter due consideration.

Conclusion

United Nations system revenues increased by more than a third between 2010 and 2017—from nearly \$39.5 billion to \$53.2 billion. Cumulatively, the U.N. received \$364.6 billion over that period. The U.S. has been and remains the U.N. system’s largest contributor, providing approximately one-fifth of total contributions on average annually over that period. According to U.N. data and U.S. reporting, the U.S. has provided more than \$60 billion to the U.N. system over that eight-year period. Unfortunately, there is

22. U.S. Code Title 22, Section 287e.

23. United Nations System, “Directory of United Nations System Organizations: Other UN System Organizations and Entities,” <http://www.unsystem.org/more-entities> (accessed February 28, 2019).

significant disparity—billions of dollars—between sources on U.S. contributions. In addition, unlike the U.N. system where the UNCEB tracks revenues, there is no alternative source to the U.S. government for U.S. contributions to non-U.N. organizations, and some periodically fall through the reporting cracks.

Congress and the Administration, as stewards of U.S. taxpayer dollars, have a responsibility to accurately track and report on U.S. contributions to the U.N. system and other international organizations. Congress should improve the accuracy and transparency of these contributions by reforming current reporting requirements, and requiring the Department of State to conduct a periodic cost-benefit analysis of U.S. contributions and membership in all international organizations. The U.S. must ensure that it is prioritizing its funds according to U.S. interests and that U.S. taxpayers get real value for their money.

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