

## 35. United Nations

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THE United Nations was founded to maintain international peace and security, promote self-determination and basic human rights, and protect fundamental freedoms, but member states have piled numerous mandates and responsibilities on the U.N. that are far beyond these original responsibilities and vastly outstrip its resources and capabilities. Due to this accretion of poorly thought-out mandates, insufficient transparency and accountability, and the reluctance of member states to curtail cherished sinecures, the system is bureaucratic, costly, cumbersome, and lacking in oversight. The General Assembly is captured by endless, largely pointless debates covering every conceivable issue. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is unfocused and offers little to justify its time and expense. The Secretariat is beset by a bloated staff, micromanagement by member states, and inadequate oversight.

The U.S. has taken advantage of recent highly publicized U.N. scandals to push for reform and, with the help of other reform-minded member states, has achieved some notable successes: creation of an Independent Audit Advisory Committee to provide oversight of the U.N. budget; an Ethics Office to instruct staff on their ethical responsibilities and monitor compliance; a strong whistleblower policy to protect those who come forward with claims of waste, fraud, and abuse; financial disclosure requirements for many U.N. officials and their spouses; a Peace Building Commission to facilitate post-conflict efforts; and support for the Democracy Fund. It is clearly in the interests of the United States to engage the United Nations and use the organization to advance its interests as a force multiplier and as a means to facilitate cooperation from other nations to address common problems. However, Washington should not let the U.N.'s occasional utility restrict America's ability to protect its own interests. The United States should not hesitate to support or oppose changes based on their likely impact on U.S. interests.

### Notes

### Recommendations

#### 1. Protect America's ability to act as necessary to protect its interests.

The U.S. should avoid either delaying necessary actions simply because

of a lack of U.N. support or feeling compelled to work solely through that organization. Washington must not allow the U.N. to limit the freedom of the U.S. and other democratic nation-states to act in their own national interests, either unilaterally or in concert.

**2. Oppose expansion of the U.N. Security Council.** The Security Council is subject to delay and indecisiveness, as its failures in Iraq and Sudan clearly demonstrate, but a larger council would not solve these problems. On the contrary, it would further undermine the council's ability to act decisively, as timely action would fall victim to political impasse, conflicting interests, or debate among nations that have little to contribute to its ultimate responsibility: the enforcement of international peace and security.

**3. Use diplomacy and financial leverage to press for U.N. reform.** The U.N.'s inefficiency and lack of accountability must be curbed and its resources focused on fewer mandates in areas where the organization can act effectively. America has long sought to make the U.N. smaller, more efficient, and more focused on issues where the organization has a comparative advantage. Dissatisfaction with the U.N.'s management and effectiveness goes back nearly to its founding, but few countries share America's concern for U.N. waste, inefficiency, or ineffectiveness. In the past, the U.S. has used financial withholding to facilitate U.N. reform. The 1985 Kassebaum–Solomon amendment led to the consensus-based budgeting process used by the U.N. today. Another key reform achieved in part through withholding was creation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 1994. Financial withholding can be an effective lever for U.N. reform and should remain an option.

**4. Replace the discredited Commission on Human Rights with a smaller, more effective Human Rights Council that includes standards to prevent abusers from gaining seats.** A key step toward restoring the credibility of the U.N. is to require that it champion the causes of political and economic freedom rather than providing a façade of respectability to its many members who repress their citizens and promote instability abroad. Until such a human rights body exists in the U.N., the U.S. and other like-minded countries should seek to establish a complementary human rights body outside the U.N. The cost of failing to reform the U.N. is high, not just for a U.N. that risks being ignored when difficult issues are considered, but also for America, which would be forced to expend greater treasure and effort to resolve problems of mutual concern. Without constant pressure, including financial pressure, change is unlikely to occur, and there will be needless repetition of crisis, expressions of concern, cosmetic reform, and quiet inaction.

## Notes

## Facts and Figures

- The United Nations has 191 member states, all of which have an equal vote in the General Assembly.
- The U.N., in its broadest definition, is larger than most people realize, consisting of dozens of international funds, organizations, and programs that fall, to a greater or lesser degree, under the umbrella of the United Nations.
- At the core are bodies established by the U.N. Charter and funded by assessed contributions: the General Assembly, Security Council, ECO-SOC, Trusteeship Council (now defunct), International Court of Justice, and Secretariat.
- About 24 semi-independent programs and funds, institutes, and other entities for the most part are independently funded but may receive funds through the U.N. regular budget and have a reporting relationship with the General Assembly, such as the U.N. Development Program, U.N. Population Fund, U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNAIDS, and Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Another group of independent organizations, which do not report to the Secretariat or the General Assembly, includes (among others) the World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Health Organization, and World Trade Organization.
- The U.S. has been the largest financial contributor to the U.N. since its creation in 1945.
- The U.S. pays 22 percent of the U.N. regular budget, as well as 27 percent of the peacekeeping budget, and provides extensive voluntary support annually. According to the State Department, U.S. financial contributions to the U.N. system in the 2004 calendar year were well over \$3 billion.
- For fiscal year 2007, the President requested \$423 million for the United States' assessed contribution to the U.N. regular budget and well over \$400 million for the United States' assessed contribution to U.N. specialized agencies. The President also requested \$1.135 billion for U.S. assessments to the U.N. peacekeeping budget and \$33 million for international war crimes tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Each year, the U.S. also provides about \$300 million in voluntary contributions to specific U.N.-affiliated organizations.

## Notes

■ The U.S. Department of Defense makes substantial voluntary and indirect contributions to U.N. peacekeeping that are not included in State Department estimates of the U.S. contribution to the U.N. The Government Accountability Office reported in 2002 that U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations from 1996 to 2001 were an estimated \$3.45 billion. The GAO also estimated that indirect U.S. contributions from 1996 through 2001 that benefited U.N. peacekeeping, primarily through DOD, totaled \$24.2 billion.

■ By comparison, the smallest contributor to the U.N. regular budget pays 0.001 percent of the regular budget, or about \$19,000 per year based on the 2006/2007 biennial budget of \$3.799 billion. The contributions of the 128 lowest contributors to the U.N. regular budget total less than 1 percent of the budget.

■ According to the U.N., as of December 31, 2005, there were 15 U.N. peacekeeping missions in operation involving nearly 84,000 personnel, of whom 387 were American (359 police, 18 military observers, and 10 soldiers).

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*This chapter can be read online at [issues2006.org/un](http://issues2006.org/un).*

## Notes

### Additional Reading

Brett D. Schaefer, John J. Tkacik, Jr., and James L. Gattuso, "Keep the Internet Free of the United Nations," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 904, November 2, 2005, at [www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm904.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm904.cfm).

Brett D. Schaefer, "The United Nations Reform Act of 2005: A Powerful Lever to Advance U.N. Reform," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 759, June 10, 2005, at [www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm759.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm759.cfm).

Brett D. Schaefer, "The Bush Administration's Policy on the International Criminal Court Is Correct," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1830, March 8, 2005, at [www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1830.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1830.cfm).

Brett D. Schaefer, "American Generosity Is Underappreciated," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 630, December 30, 2004, at [www.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/wm630.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/wm630.cfm).