

How the U.S. Should Address Rising Chinese Influence at the United Nations

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

China's increasing influence at the U.N. is a legitimate concern, and the U.S. must ensure that China does not directly undermine American interests.

China seeks to expand its influence by shaping the U.N.'s values, programs, and policy positions in ways that benefit Chinese priorities and ideology.

The U.S. should promote American and allied leadership in key organizations, encourage American employment, and apply strategic pressure to counter China.

On June 23, 2019, the United Nations member states elected Qu Dongyu of China as Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and he assumed office on August 1.¹ This means that a Chinese national is now in charge of four of the 15 specialized agencies of the U.N. This continues a trend of rising Chinese influence, which critics have attributed to U.S. retreat under the current Administration. Although the rising influence of China is undeniable, this trend has been evident for over a decade, and is not due to the policies of the current Administration. In fact, a Chinese national also led four U.N. specialized agencies in 2015 and 2016 under the previous Administration.

Nonetheless, increasing Chinese influence is a legitimate concern for the United States. Authoritarian states like China pressure their nationals to advance their interests within international

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organizations, which is in direct contravention to the principle of neutrality to which U.N. employees are supposed to adhere. Examples of Chinese nationals abusing their authority to advance Chinese interests are growing. Although not every international organization is essential or important to U.S. interests, a number of international organizations address or oversee matters that affect U.S. interests significantly. To protect those interests and counter pernicious influence by China and other hostile governments, the U.S. should:

- **Identify the purpose, scope, and means of expanded Chinese influence in international organizations.** Congress should charge the U.S. intelligence community with reporting on Chinese objectives, tactics, and influence in international organizations. These reports should be the basis for adjusting U.S. policy and resources to equip the executive branch to counter Chinese influence where it undermines U.S. interests or the independence and purposes of those organizations.
- **Conduct an objective cost-benefit analysis of U.S. participation in each international organization.** It is not enough to understand where Chinese influence is expanding; the U.S. must understand the relative value of international organizations to U.S. economic, defense, and foreign policy interests.
- **Apply U.S. resources judiciously.** Not all international organizations are equally important, and the U.S. should not squander finite time, effort, and resources on international organizations of dubious merit. The U.S. should focus its effort and resources on countering Chinese influence, advancing U.S. policy preferences, and increasing employment of U.S. nationals, particularly in senior positions, *in those organizations whose remit affects key U.S. interests.*
- **Identify and carefully vet highly qualified candidates for leadership positions in international organizations well in advance of elections.** The purpose should be to ensure their independence and focus on approved missions and mandates.
- **Counter Chinese financial and political pressure on foreign governments.** The U.S. must use its own influence and assistance to counter Chinese pressure.

- **Press the U.N., the specialized agencies, and U.N. funds and programs to increase employment of U.S. nationals.** This has long been an objective of the U.S. government, and the Trump Administration has made it a priority, but addressing the matter is a gradual process involving recruitment, promotion, and, occasionally, U.S. government intervention.
- **Elevate multilateral affairs and international organizations within the State Department by establishing an Under Secretary for Multilateral Affairs.** Although the U.S. might prefer otherwise, diplomatic, economic, and security matters are increasingly discussed, negotiated, implemented, and acted upon through multilateral initiatives or in international organizations, and the U.S. needs a more senior official coordinating U.S. policy.

As China becomes more economically and militarily powerful, its influence and presence in the United Nations will likewise grow. The U.S. cannot reverse this trend entirely, which is based on political and financial realities, but it must take strategic steps to ensure that Chinese influence is reasonably contained and its leadership is restricted and channeled to the parts of the organization that do not directly undermine U.S. interests.

Chinese Influence in the U.N. System

Many news articles over the past year have highlighted Chinese influence in the U.N. system and attributed it to “the United States retreating from international leadership under the Trump administration.”² The expansion of Chinese influence in the U.N. system is undeniable, albeit uneven, but is not a recent phenomenon nor solely attributable to U.S. policy under the current Administration.

Chinese efforts to increase influence in the U.N. system have grown alongside China’s rise as a political and economic power over the past 20 years, and across a number of U.N. forums. For instance, China has used its veto to block a U.N. Security Council resolution 12 times since 1971, when the United Nations recognized the People’s Republic of China as the official government. All but three of those vetoes occurred since 2007 and served to prevent Security Council action against Burma, Syria, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.³ Since 2013, China has become increasingly assertive in U.N. human rights institutions, promoting “its own interpretation of international norms and mechanisms.”⁴ China has increased the number of personnel participating in U.N. peacekeeping operations from 52 in May 2000 to

2,534 in May 2019.⁵ China's peacekeepers currently total more than the combined number of peacekeepers from four other permanent members of the Security Council. As Chinese influence has grown, so has its ability to assert policies that are at odds with American interests, or are designed to blunt U.N. mechanisms deemed troublesome or problematic by China.

Increasingly, China has highlighted its rising financial contributions to the U.N. system to complement its political influence. As its economy has grown, China's share of the U.N. regular budget has climbed from less than 0.995 percent in 2000 to 12.005 percent for 2019.⁶ Similarly, China's peacekeeping assessment increased from 1.9354 percent in 2001 to 15.2197 percent in 2019. China is now the second-highest-assessed country in the U.N. behind only the U.S., which is assessed 22 percent for the regular budget and 27.8912 percent for the peacekeeping budget.

Chinese assessments have grown quickly, but that growth should be put into context. For instance, in 2019, the U.S. regular budget and peacekeeping assessment is about 45 percent higher than China's assessment. Moreover, growth in China's voluntary contributions has not matched its assessed contributions, which explains why China was only the fifth-largest overall donor to the U.N. system in 2017. That year, Chinese contributions totaled \$1.4 billion overall, but included only \$209 million in voluntary contributions. This was less than 14 percent of the \$10.5 billion that the U.S. contributed that year because almost two-thirds of U.S. contributions to the U.N. system in 2017 (\$6.9 billion) were voluntary contributions.⁷ If the U.S. provided voluntary contributions at the Chinese level, America's contributions to the U.N. system in 2017 would have been about \$4.1 billion, not \$10.5 billion. Although U.S. funding to the U.N. system is far higher, China receives more recognition and appreciation for its smaller contributions for several reasons, including the fact that, unlike China, U.S. assessments have been largely static and are taken for granted by other member states. China also rarely demands budgetary restraint or reforms that inconvenience the U.N. or member states.⁸

Chinese Leadership in U.N. Specialized Agencies. The most notable positive outcome from the Chinese perspective, as reported by the press, is getting Chinese nationals elected to leadership positions in international organizations. With the election of Qu Dongyu, Chinese nationals now lead four U.N. specialized agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). For comparison: A French national leads two specialized agencies (the International Monetary Fund and the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the United Kingdom leads one

(the International Labor Organization), and the U.S. leads one (the World Bank), although a U.S. national does lead the U.N. Children's Fund and the World Food Program, which are large and prominent U.N. organizations.

Some foreign policy experts have blamed Trump Administration policy for ceding influence to China, but China has been pursuing this goal successfully for a number of years.⁹ The first Chinese national to lead a U.N. specialized agency was Margaret Chan at the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007, who left office at the end of her second term in July 2017. Li Yong became Director-General of the UNIDO in 2013. Houlin Zhao became Secretary-General of the ITU in 2015. Likewise, Fang Liu became Secretary-General of ICAO in 2015. Li Yong, Houlin Zhao, and Fang Liu remain in office. In other words, Chinese nationals led four U.N. specialized agencies in 2015 and 2016—before Donald Trump became President.

Chinese Nationals in the U.N. System. Some news reports lump the U.N. Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), which is overseen by Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin of China, in with the FAO, the ICAO, the ITU, and UNIDO.¹⁰ While this position is important, UN DESA is a department of the U.N. Secretariat, not an independent organization. As such, Liu Zhenmin is not head of a specialized agency, but a senior U.N. official whose rank is below that of the heads of U.N. specialized agencies.¹¹

Among senior U.N. officials, China has made less progress than it has among the leadership positions. The United Nations lists only three Chinese nationals among 202 total senior U.N. officials, that is, those holding the rank of Deputy Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General, or equivalent ranks.¹² By comparison, 23 U.S. nationals are currently serving as senior U.N. officials.

Article 101 of the U.N. Charter states:

The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

Each U.N. organization has its own procedures for incorporating geographical representation into staff recruitment and composition, including some with formulas based on membership status, financial contributions, and share of the global population.

Nonetheless, there are discrepancies, with some countries over-represented and others under-represented. For instance, under current calculations, Brazil, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S. are among the

TABLE 1

**U.N. Permanent Security Council Members:
Number and Percentage of U.N. System Staff**

	China	France	Russia	U.K.	USA	Total U.N. System Staff
2007	666 (0.88%)	4,094 (5.44%)	1,001 (1.33%)	2,312 (3.07%)	4,175 (5.55%)	75,282
2008	737 (1.04%)	4,110 (5.81%)	890 (1.26%)	2,243 (3.17%)	4,350 (6.14%)	70,792
2009	794 (0.96%)	4,320 (5.22%)	918 (1.11%)	2,403 (2.90%)	4,814 (5.82%)	82,737
2010	844 (0.97%)	4,271 (4.93%)	912 (1.05%)	2,392 (2.76%)	4,886 (5.64%)	86,622
2011	886 (1.05%)	4,212 (4.99%)	896 (1.06%)	2,432 (2.88%)	5,080 (6.02%)	84,354
2012	888 (1.07%)	4,174 (5.01%)	862 (1.03%)	2,456 (2.95%)	5,127 (6.15%)	83,319
2013	885 (1.05%)	4,188 (4.98%)	851 (1.01%)	2,455 (2.92%)	5,063 (6.02%)	84,069
2014	893 (1.07%)	4,150 (4.96%)	844 (1.01%)	2,419 (2.89%)	4,910 (5.87%)	83,618
2015	1,011 (1.03%)	4,201 (4.27%)	906 (0.92%)	2,375 (2.41%)	5,193 (5.27%)	98,469
2016	1,035 (1.06%)	4,172 (4.26%)	922 (0.94%)	2,379 (2.43%)	4,960 (5.07%)	97,891
2017	1,115 (1.06%)	4,332 (4.10%)	1,004 (0.95%)	2,441 (2.31%)	5,275 (5.00%)	105,594

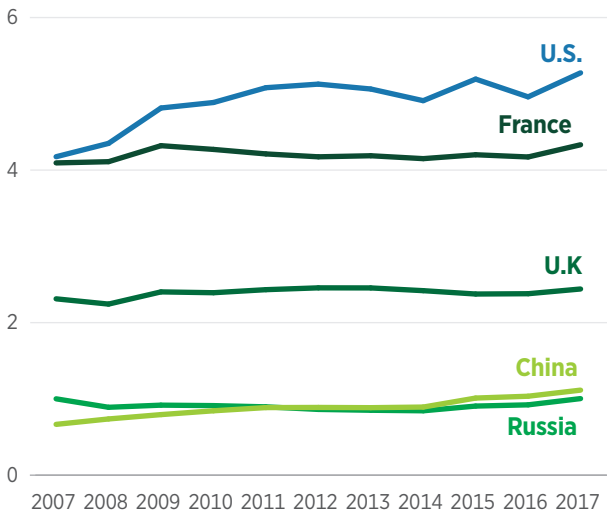
SOURCE: United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, "UN System HR Statistics Report," 2007-2017, <https://www.unsystem.org/content/un-system-human-resources-statistics-reports> (accessed August 7, 2019).

countries most under-represented in U.N. Secretariat staff positions that are subject to geographical status, while nationals from Canada, France, Italy, Kenya, and Spain are among the countries most over-represented.¹³ The U.S. has been under-represented historically in other U.N. organizations with geographical distribution formulas.¹⁴

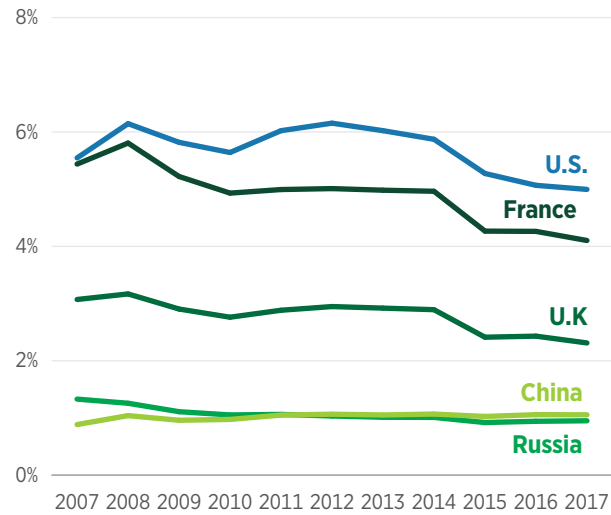
CHART 1

U.N. Permanent Security Council Members: Number and Percentage of U.N. System Staff

IN THOUSANDS OF U.N. SYSTEM STAFF



PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL U.N. SYSTEM STAFF



SOURCE: United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, "UN System HR Statistics Report," 2007-2017, <https://www.unsystem.org/content/un-system-human-resources-statistics-reports> (accessed August 12, 2019).

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Unlike with leadership positions in U.N. specialized agencies, where China is over-represented compared to other major donors, Chinese citizens are under-represented among U.N. Secretariat staff subject to geographical status.¹⁵ However, it is worth highlighting the fact that Japan, which has the third-largest U.N. assessment, is even more under-represented.¹⁶

In addition, Chinese nationals represent a relatively small portion of overall U.N. staff. Table 1 compares U.N. employment among the permanent members of the Security Council, and shows that the U.N. system employed 1,115 Chinese nationals in 2017 (1.06 percent of U.N. employees). This is below China's expected share based on financial contributions and share of the global population, but higher both in number and percentage of total U.N. staff than a decade ago. In other words, Chinese employment is growing both in numbers and as a share of overall U.N. system employment. By contrast, U.N. employment for the other permanent members of the Security Council has fallen or remained steady as a percentage of total U.N. system employment.

Different Expectations

An increasing number of Chinese nationals in the U.N. is not objectionable in the abstract; it is troublesome because the Chinese government has expectations of its nationals that run counter to the principle of neutrality enshrined in the United Nations Charter. U.N. employees are expected to be impartial and independent in fulfilling their responsibilities. Specifically, Article 100 states:

1. In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization...
2. Each Member of the United Nations undertakes to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities.¹⁷

When they are hired, U.N. employees take an oath of office to honor these restrictions.¹⁸ Observance of this principle of independence varies among the 105,574 individuals employed by the United Nations and its affiliated organizations.¹⁹ The more confident employees are that their actions or decisions will not result in punishment, incarceration, or other retaliation from their government, the more likely they are to fulfill their responsibilities independently of the desires or instructions of their governments. Unsurprisingly, U.N. employees from Western countries often act independently of, even counter to, the wishes of their governments.

Authoritarian states, by contrast, pressure their nationals to advance their interests within international organizations. As detailed in a 1985 Senate report, the Soviet Union effectively placed its nationals in the U.N. Secretariat to

collect information on UN activities; to spot, assess, and recruit agents; to support worldwide intelligence operations; and to collect scientific and technical information of value to the USSR.

.... The Soviets will maintain a distinct advantage in the United Nations until their diplomatic and intelligence efforts are matched by systematic, long-term Western opposition.²⁰

Soviet citizens employed at the U.N. received specific instructions on how to advance Soviet goals within their remit and were required to report to KGB officials on their progress and any matters of note.

Today, China is the authoritarian state that most closely mirrors the Soviet Union in its perspective on the loyalty of its nationals in the U.N. system. In a 2019 interview, Wu Hongbo, former U.N. Under-Secretary-General in charge of UN DESA admitted—after acknowledging that U.N. civil servants were not supposed to accept instructions from outside the U.N. or from governments—that his nationality required him to act in the interests of China as a U.N. civil servant. He gave an example of how he instructed U.N. security to remove a “Xinjiang separatist” from a seminar being held at the United Nations. U.N. security expelled the person from the U.N. building. When an Assistant Secretary-General complained that this violated freedom of speech, Wu Hongbo used his superior rank to intimidate the other official. He concluded by saying, “I think being a Chinese diplomat means one can’t be careless, when it is about protecting China’s national interest and safety. We have to strongly defend the motherland’s interests.”²¹

In another example, with a Chinese national in charge of the ICAO, the organization has rejected Taiwanese efforts to attend ICAO meetings, despite Taiwan being a major air traffic hub.²² News reports provide additional examples of Chinese officials intimidating U.N. staff in violation of U.N. rules and harassing nongovernmental organizations critical of Chinese policies.²³ China does not hesitate to act when an official fails to advance its interests. In October 2018, China arrested the president of Interpol, Meng Hongwei, and charged him with abuse of power and refusing to “follow party decisions.”²⁴ Hongwei was one of the highest-level Chinese nationals in any international organization.

A Comprehensive Strategy

China is interested in expanding its influence within the U.N., not because it supports the founding principles of the U.N., but in order to shift the values, programs, and policies of the U.N. in ways that benefit Chinese priorities and ideology. This shift would harm U.S. interests and the system of values and practices embodied in the international system that were established in the postwar era. As summarized in the 2017 National Security Strategy,

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make

economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.... China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.²⁵

News reports indicate that the U.S. is concerned about China's increasing influence in international organizations and has taken steps to address the issue, including warning countries of the potential advantage that China gains through its lending, and opposing Chinese-government-drafted text in U.N. resolutions and documents.²⁶ However, countering Chinese influence requires a broader, comprehensive, and longer-term strategy based on a detailed assessment of Chinese interests and tactics, promoting U.S. and like-minded leadership in key international organizations, promoting U.S. employment in international organizations, and applying U.S. pressure purposefully and judiciously. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Identify the purpose, scope, and means of expanded Chinese influence in international organizations.** As it did during the Cold War when Soviet influence in the U.N. was a major concern,²⁷ Congress should request that the U.S. intelligence community report on Chinese objectives, tactics, and progress in influencing international organizations to their benefit. This report should be the basis for adjusting U.S. policy and resources to equip the executive branch to counter Chinese influence where it undermines U.S. interests or the independence and purposes of those organizations.
- **Conduct an objective cost-benefit analysis of U.S. participation in each international organization.** It is not enough to understand where Chinese influence is expanding; the U.S. must also understand the relative value of international organizations to U.S. economic, defense, and foreign policy interests. Identifying the organizations that are most, and least, vital to U.S. interests, and which provide the most, and least, value for money would be an invaluable guide in allocating U.S. taxpayer dollars to most effectively advance U.S. interests. It would also help to determine where the U.S. should exert the most effort to increase employment of U.S. nationals in professional and leadership positions—and where most vigorously to oppose candidates that raise U.S. concerns.
- **Apply U.S. resources judiciously.** Not all international organizations are equally important, and the U.S. should not squander

finite time, effort, and resources on international organizations of dubious merit. For instance, the Clinton Administration withdrew from UNIDO after criticizing it for lack of purpose.²⁸ After a comprehensive interagency review of 50 international organizations, the Clinton Administration also decided to withdraw from the U.N. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) because the “benefits to the U.S. private sector did not depend on governmental participation” in the organization.²⁹ A Chinese national now leads UNIDO, but expending limited time and resources on UNIDO simply to counterbalance Chinese influence is foolish. Likewise, rejoining the UNWTO does not support broader U.S. interests even if the Chinese seek to assert influence in that organization.³⁰ The U.S. should focus its effort and resources on countering Chinese influence, advancing U.S. policy preferences, and increasing employment of U.S. nationals, particularly in senior positions, *in those organizations whose remit affects key U.S. interests*. A good example of such an organization is the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is extremely useful in monitoring illicit nuclear weapons programs in Iran and elsewhere. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano recently passed away. The U.S. should take all reasonable steps to ensure that an American or national of a like-minded country becomes the next IAEA Director General.

- **Identify and carefully vet highly qualified candidates for leadership positions well in advance of elections.** The status of the U.S. as a major military and economic power and the largest financial supporter of the U.N. should result in a U.S. national leading a handful of important international organizations, and the U.S. should never hesitate to nominate a qualified American to lead an international organization. However, it would be unrealistic to expect an American, or the nationals of any single country, to lead more than a few international organizations whose membership includes most of the world’s governments. In cases where a U.S. national is unlikely to win, the U.S. should support individuals from other nations who are well qualified, support the core purposes and mission of the organization, are not beholden to governments whose priorities are antithetical to U.S. interests, and are committed to ensuring that the organization operates efficiently, accountably, and transparently. To increase chances of success, the U.S. should remain cognizant of upcoming elections for U.N. leadership positions and begin campaigning for its preferred

TABLE 2

Heads of International Organizations: Terms and Upcoming Elections (Page 1 of 2)

Organization	Title	Name	Nationality	Term (Years)	Entered Office	End of Term
United Nations	Secretary-General	Antonio Gueterres	Portugal	5	2017	2022
U.N.-SPECIALIZED AGENCIES						
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	Director General	Qu Dongyu	China	4	2019	2023
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	Secretary-General	Fang Liu	China	3	2015	2021
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	President	Gilbert F. Hounbo	Togo	4	2017	2021
International Labor Organization (ILO)	Director General	Guy Ryder	U.K.	5	2012	2022
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	Secretary-General	Kitack Lim	Korea	4	2016	2020
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Managing Director	Christine Lagarde*	France	5	2011	2021
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	Secretary-General	Houlin Zhao	China	4	2015	2023
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	Director General	Audrey Azoulay	France	4	2017	2021
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	Director General	LI Yong	China	4	2013	2021
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	Director General	Bishar Abdirahman Hussein	Kenya	4	2012	2020
World Bank	President	David Malpass	USA	5	2019	2024
World Health Organization (WHO)	Director General	Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus	Ethiopia	5	2017	2022
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	Director General	Francis Gurry	Australia	6	2008	2020
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	Secretary-General	Petteri Taalas	Finland	4	2016	2020
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Secretary-General	Zurab Pololikashvili	Georgia	4	2018	2022
MAJOR U.N. FUNDS AND PROGRAMS						
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	High Commissioner	Filippo Grandi	Italy	5	2016	2021
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Executive Director	Henrietta Fore	USA	5	2018	2023
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	Secretary-General	Mukhisa Kituyi	Kenya	4	2013	2021
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Administrator	Achim Steiner	Germany	4	2017	2021
United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)	Executive Director	Inger Andersen	Denmark	4	2019	2023
United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN Habitat)	Executive Director	Maimunah Mohd Sharif	Malaysia	4	2018	2022
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	Executive Director	Natalia Kanem	Panama	4	2017	2021
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	Commissioner General	Pierre Krähenbühl	Switzerland	3	2014	2020
World Food Program (WFP)	Executive Director	David Beasley	USA	5	2017	2022

TABLE 2

Heads of International Organizations: Terms and Upcoming Elections (Page 2 of 2)

Organization	Title	Name	Nationality	Term (Years)	Entered Office	End of Term
U.N.-RELATED INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS						
Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)	Executive Secretary	Lassina Zerbo	Burkina Faso	4	2013	2021
International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA)	Director General	Cornel Feruta (Acting)***	Romania	4	—	—
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Director General	António Manuel de Carvalho Ferreira Vitorino	Portugal	5	2018	2023
International Seabed Authority (ISA)	Secretary-General	Michael W. Lodge	UK	4	2017	2021
International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)	President	Paik Jin-hyun	South Korea	3	2017	2020
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)	Director General	Fernando Arias	Spain	4	2018	2022
World Trade Organization (WTO)	Director General	Roberto Azevêdo	Brazil	4	2013	2021
OTHER MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS						
International Criminal Court (ICC)	President	Chile Eboe-Osuji	Nigeria	3	2018	2021
INTERPOL	Secretary-General	Jürgen Stock	Germany	5	2014	2019

* Resigned effective September 12, 2019.

** IAEA Director General Yukiya Amaro (Japan) died on July 18, 2019.

SOURCES: Websites of individual international organizations.

candidates well in advance of the election. For instance, as listed in Table 2, seven significant elections are scheduled between now and the end of 2020. In addition, the death of IAEA Director General Amaro will result in the premature election for that post this year, which underscores the value of advance preparation.

A long lead-time also aids vetting to ensure that the U.S. assessment of the candidates is accurate and that they do not have any complications that could derail the candidacy. In addition, once the election process commences, the U.S. must regularly and honestly gauge the chances of success of particular candidates, and know when to shift support to a second-best option if the first pick is unlikely to win. Getting the best candidate is not always possible—sometimes success will be simply avoiding the worst outcome.

- **Counter Chinese financial and political pressure.** The Chinese have skillfully used their historical relationship with developing countries to assist their efforts to elect Chinese nationals to lead international organizations. China has complemented these historical relationships with carrots and sticks, that is, its extensive loans to, and investments in, developing countries,³¹ in order to influence these countries. For instance, Médi Mounqui of Cameroon withdrew from the FAO leadership race after, reportedly, China forgave \$78.4 million in debts owed by Cameroon to China.³² Numerous reports provide additional examples of China pressuring other countries to not co-sponsor, participate in, or attend events critical of China, and pressuring other countries to support Chinese positions.³³ This influence is not restricted to developing countries. After receiving Chinese investment, Greece blocked a European Union statement in the U.N. on Chinese human rights.³⁴ The U.S. must use its own influence and assistance to counter Chinese financial leverage and convince developing countries, who overwhelmingly are the beneficiaries of projects and programs of international organizations, that independent management serves their interest more than the head of an organization beholden to, and acting at the direction of, Beijing.
- **Press the U.N., the specialized agencies, and U.N. funds and programs to increase employment of U.S. nationals.** This has long been an objective of the U.S. government, whose nationals have historically been under-represented in U.N. organizations, and Congress has required the State Department to report on U.S. employment in U.N. organizations with geographic distribution formulas for staff since 1991.³⁵ Past Government Accountability Office reports on this matter outline a number of challenges in increasing employment of U.S. nationals in the U.N. system that remain relevant today.³⁶ The Trump Administration has made this a priority, but addressing the matter is a gradual process involving recruitment, promotion, and occasional U.S. government intervention.³⁷
- **Elevate multilateral affairs and international organizations within the State Department by establishing an Under Secretary for Multilateral Affairs.** Although the U.S. might prefer otherwise, diplomatic, economic, and security matters are increasingly discussed, negotiated, implemented, and acted upon through multilateral initiatives or in international organizations. Currently, responsibility for

deciding policy in international organizations is dispersed within the Department of State and other parts of the U.S. government, which can lead to conflict or gridlock due to gaps in authority or differing priorities. Worse, issues may be neglected for lack of attention from a senior official. There needs to be better coordination of U.S. policy on multilateral matters that balances programmatic and ideological efforts with practical diplomatic efforts to advance U.S. interests. An Under Secretary for Multilateral Affairs within the Department of State charged with coordinating and directing U.S. policy in international organizations and on multilateral matters would be better positioned to oversee and set policy within the State Department and resolve differences with other agencies.

Conclusion

As China becomes more economically and militarily powerful, its influence and presence in the United Nations and other international organizations will likewise grow. In recent years, China has successfully capitalized on its historical relationships with developing countries, abetted by financial and political carrots and sticks, and increasing financial contributions to secure leadership of the FAO, the ICAO, the ITU, and UNIDO. The U.S. cannot reverse this trend entirely, which is based on political and financial realities, but it must take strategic steps to ensure that Chinese influence is reasonably contained and its leadership is restricted and channeled to the parts of the organization that do not directly undermine U.S. interests. This requires a broad, comprehensive, long-term strategy based on a detailed assessment of Chinese interests and tactics, promoting U.S. and like-minded leadership in key international organizations, promoting U.S. employment in international organizations, and applying U.S. pressure purposefully and judiciously.

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Endnotes

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