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Threats to United States Support for the United Nations An Overview

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Despite the global impact of the United Nations (UN) in its three pillars of work - human rights, peace and security, and development - and the vital contributions made by the United States to the organization, there are growing concerns that the new US administration may seek to alter its support for and funding of the UN. This concern comes after various draft Executive Orders became public during the first weeks of the US administration, illustrating an approach that, if undertaken, would drastically change financing for the UN. The draft Executive Orders follow the introduction of legislation in both the House and Senate that focuses on issues related to US funding and involvement in the UN.

While it remains to be seen how the various draft bills and draft Executive Orders may or may not progress, the existence of such measures shows the growing uncertain environment facing the UN and global efforts for peace more broadly.

Below you will find further information on the impact of the UN; how the US has funded the United Nations; what the US House and Senate bills, and draft Executive Orders call for; avenues for you to show your support for the United Nations; and materials for further reading.

Impact of the work of the United Nations

The diverse work of the United Nations includes efforts to address the most critical and pressing issues facing the world, as well as to undertake initiatives to improve our daily lives. The past decade has witnessed a doubling in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, and the UN works globally to provide immediate support to victims of conflict and natural disasters. The United Nations seeks to support countries emerging from conflict so they can build long-term, sustainable peace. Such work is vitally important given the cyclical nature of war.

But the UN does far more than prevent conflict and provide humanitarian services. Its Members have taken unprecedented action to address the continued effects of climate change and to strive to protect the earth for generations to come through the adoption of the Paris climate agreement. Through its global health work, the United Nations has guided the eradication of diseases, supported maternal and child health, and combated the spread of health crises. Initiatives to support education and literacy have led to a rise in access to schooling and the increase in literate adults, while work in the area of telecommunications sets the norms to connect people throughout the world. Focus by the UN on combating hunger, and undertaking efforts to ensure food security, including through support to small-scale farmers who provide at least 70% of the world's food, contributes to a people-centered approach to development, and the protection of the environment. Recently, in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all Member States committed to a "*plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity*" that, through achievement of its 17 Goals, will lead to the strengthening of more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Through its various bodies, such as the [Security Council](#), [General Assembly](#), [Peacebuilding Commission](#) and [Human Rights Council](#), Member States lend their voices to call for upholding human rights, and to take measures to build and promote sustainable peace. Additionally, the United Nations provides the only forum for all Member States to participate as equals within the UN General Assembly, and to contribute towards fostering a peaceful world.

In sum, we are supported on a daily basis, either directly or indirectly, by the breadth of work conducted by the United Nations at its headquarters, and in countries across the world.

Despite its tremendous impact, financial support for the UN is just a fraction of annual military spending. Global military spending exceeds \$1.6 trillion USD, dwarfing the \$8 billion USD budget for UN peacekeeping and the total UN-related spending of \$48 billion USD. Furthermore, research has [shown](#) that taking steps to invest in prevention – rather than responding to crises – is “*on average, 60 times more cost effective,*” illustrating the urgent and economical needs for supporting the work of the UN and other actors working towards peace.

Background on US funding to the UN

What does the US contribute?

The United States, as a founding member of the UN, a permanent member on the Security Council, and a substantial [financial contributor](#) to the UN, plays a critical role in the work of the United Nations. The US provides 22% of the overall budget, and 28% of the budget for peacekeeping operations.

While the US provides the highest percentages allotted for a Member State, these financial contributions amount to a mere 0.1% of the overall US federal budget. The amount provided to the UN by the US is put into perspective when considering how much the country [spends](#) on its military budget – almost \$600 billion, or \$1 trillion including costs related to past wars - which is more than a third of global military spending.

Has the US threatened or defunded UN agencies before?

The current risk to the UN may be the most extreme, but the US has previously reduced funding for agencies, most notably the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In 1994, the US government put into law a [restriction](#) on funding “*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.*” This law was then put into action in 2011 when UNESCO [voted](#) to grant Palestine full membership into the body.

Prior to the 2011 vote, the US provided 22% - or \$80 million annually – to UNESCO. This funding was then cut from the UNESCO budget. As a result, UNESCO had to undergo a period in which it [suspended](#) new programs while it sought to identify a course forward for making up for the funding loss. Additionally, in 2013, the United States [lost](#) its voting rights at UNESCO after not having contributed to the budget as UNESCO rules require suspension if a Member has not paid dues in two years.

Current proposals before the US government – what risk to the UN?

There are multiple proposals before the US government, which are in various forms and have different potential implications. It remains to be seen if and how the below drafts or proposals will move forward.

Proposed House and Senate Legislation

A bill becomes a law after it passes the House of Representatives and the Senate, and then is signed by the President. On average, only about 5% of all bills become laws. That said, proposed legislation can influence discussions and messaging on the issues in focus.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate have proposed various pieces of legislation relating to US funding of and engagement with the UN. Some bills, such as the [*American Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2017*](#) brought forward in the House, serve as a re-introduction of past legislation that has been repeatedly brought by a small minority of lawmakers. While this draft bill, and its predecessors, is alarming as it calls for drastic actions, including full withdrawal from the UN, it has historically only been supported by a small minority of lawmakers.

There are new bills before the House and Senate, however, which could potentially affect US financial support for the UN. These bills have been brought forward in response to the passage of UN Security Council (UNSC) [*Resolution 2334*](#) that reaffirms international law in respect of Israeli settlements and calls for renewed diplomatic efforts. *The Countering Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israel Activities Act* introduced in the Senate calls for a halt to funding of the UN Human Rights Council and the [*UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*](#) until certain actions are undertaken by the US Secretary of State. Bills entitled, *Safeguard Israel Act 2017*, have been brought forward in both the [House](#) and [Senate](#). These bills call for a halt to all UN funding until Resolution 2334 is repealed.

While it is unlikely that these bills will become law in their current form, their messaging has the potential to influence upcoming deliberations on and action by Congress on the federal budget. In April, Congress will be adopting legislation to set out the federal budget for Fiscal Year 2017. It is possible that, as a result of the momentum surrounding these bills, lawmakers could settle on a funding reduction that would prove detrimental to the United Nations. Such a reduction could move through Congress as lawmakers may view this as a compromise, given that the initial bills sought a complete halt to UN funding.

Draft Executive Orders

Presidents have used Executive Orders to implement policies or action across a range of issue areas. This power, while not specifically outlined, is drawn from Article II of the Constitution, which focuses on the powers and duties of the Executive Branch.

The new US Administration has been active in signing Executive Orders on a range of matters. Draft Executive Orders have also been leaked publically, with some causing great alarm as a result of their content and potential impact. Two such drafts relating to the United Nations and multilateral treaties have been particularly concerning and deserve attention.

As first reported in the [*New York Times*](#) in January 2017, the US government has produced a draft Executive Order entitled [*Auditing and Reducing US funding of International Organizations*](#) that, if signed, would create a committee to review US funding to international organizations, including the United Nations. Amongst the committee's charges is a call for it to recommend "*at least a 40 percent overall decrease*" in US funding for international organizations, including the United Nations. Such a cut would not only drastically limit the involvement of the US within the UN, but would threaten the lifesaving work carried out by the United Nations every day.

Additionally, the US government has produced a draft Executive Order entitled [*Moratorium on New Multilateral Treaties*](#) that, if signed, would create a committee to assess all multilateral treaties to

determine if the US should remain a signatory, and halt all new treaties until the committee has conducted its review.

At the time of writing, some [reporting](#) has suggested that the draft Executive Orders are on hold, but it remains unclear if the drafts will be taken off the table completely. Even if taken off the table, the existence of such draft Executive Orders gives insight into the views of the US government on its approach to the United Nations, and should remain a concern for those who support the work of the UN.

How to show your support for the United Nations

For those in the US

- Friends Committee on National Legislation
[Fully Fund the UN!](#)
Access a customizable letter to directly contact your state Senators to urge them to show their support for the United Nations.
- Better World Campaign
[Tell US Leaders: Defunding or withdrawing from the UN is not an option](#)
Contact your elected official using a customizable template letter.
- United Nations Association of the United States
[Advocacy - US UN Funding](#)
Find a number of options for action ranging from contacting your members of Congress to ways to engage on social media.

For those outside of the US

- Consider engaging with your government to voice support for the United Nations. Your local UN Association can also serve as a great start for learning more.

Further reading

Additional background information on UN funding

- Better World Campaign
[How the US Funds the UN](#): Learn more about the process for US funding to the UN.
- [Importance of Funding the UN](#): Learn about the types of funding given to the UN - assessed and voluntary - and why US funding to the UN is important.
- [Why Congress Must Oppose Efforts to Withhold Funding to the UN](#): This document explores the contributions made by the UN, and how this work contributes to advancing US priorities.
- United Nations Association of the United States
[UN Funding](#): This brief document explores the importance of US funding to the UN, and discusses how cutting funding the UN will undermine US security.

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