

## **Fiscal Year 2021 Testimony for House Appropriations Subcommittee for State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs**

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Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers, Members of the Subcommittee—thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of a robust foreign affairs budget in FY 2021. The accounts funded by this legislation support U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions to the United Nations. Specifically, we recommend \$2.616 billion for the **Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA)** account, which funds U.S. assessments for UN peacekeeping missions, and \$525.3 million for the **Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)** account, which funds voluntary contributions to regional peacekeeping initiatives and assessments for UN activities in Somalia. We also support the inclusion of language that enables us to pay our contributions to UN peacekeeping at the full assessed rate. In addition to peacekeeping-related funding, we request \$1.527 billion for the **Contributions to International Organizations (CIO)** account, which funds U.S. assessments for the UN Regular Budget and a host of UN specialized agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO). Finally, we request \$646.5 million for the International Organizations and Programs (IO&P) account, in line with what the House provided in its FY'20 State/Foreign Operations bill. This account is a critical source of voluntary contributions to the core budgets of a number of UN funds and programs.

### **The United Nations: A Critical Partner for the United States in a Turbulent World**

As the UN celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, it remains one of the bedrock institutions of the post-WWII international order. Like all large institutions, the UN's record over the past seven decades has not been perfect. On the whole though, the UN has made great progress on an array of issues in the security, health, and human rights spheres that are directly in line with U.S. priorities.

- For example, as you likely know from meetings with your local Rotary Club, the **UN vaccinates more than 45% of the world's children** and helps more than two million women per month overcome pregnancy-related risks and complications.
- In just the past three years, the **U.S. and UN collaborated to combat the scourge of opioids** and synthetic opioids like fentanyl. At the request of the U.S. government, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs voted to "schedule" the two leading chemicals used to illegally produce fentanyl in the U.S., adding them to an international control list. At the time, the State Department said that, "this vote will make it harder for the criminals that are illicitly producing fentanyl to access the necessary resources."
- Last June, Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, released a report on the murder of **Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi**, which found evidence suggesting premeditation for the killing at the highest levels of the Saudi government. This report was an important touchstone in efforts by a number of parties—including Congress—to hold the Saudi government to account for Mr. Khashoggi's brutal slaying.

The success of these types of U.S.-backed initiatives should come as no surprise. Since its inception, the U.S. has been a central and indispensable player in the UN system, holding a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, hosting UN Headquarters in New York, and serving as the organization's largest financial contributor. These factors have given the U.S. a tremendous amount of leverage to shape the UN and its agenda to advance its core national interests and values. And indeed, the UN does this in myriad ways, in addition to those outlined above.

Chief among them are its **peacekeeping operations**. Tasked with deploying to conflict zones to serve as a buffer between warring parties and civilians, carry out disarmament and demobilization processes, support democratic elections, and help fragile states build more effective and resilient rule of law institutions, blue helmeted missions have long been an important component of the international community's conflict mitigation toolbox. It is easy to understand why: there is a growing body of evidence that UN peacekeeping operations are very effective at reducing civilian deaths, shortening the duration of conflicts, and preventing dormant conflicts from reigniting.<sup>1</sup> They are also cost-effective: according to the Government Accountability Office, deploying blue helmets is eight times cheaper than sending U.S. forces to do the same job.<sup>2</sup> In addition, they are a prime example of burden-sharing at its best: as it stands, the U.S. provides just 31 military advisors and police to UN peacekeeping operations, less than 0.1% of a force numbering more than 85,000 uniformed personnel.

Over the preceding decades, the UN has operated 71 peacekeeping missions throughout the world, helping to end civil wars and bring stability to a number of countries, including Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, and Cambodia. Currently, peacekeepers are working to confront security challenges in a number of contexts, including **Mali**, where they have helped prevent extremist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS from gaining territory and reasserting control over population centers, all while suffering terrible losses. In **South Sudan**, which was plunged into a devastating civil war in 2013, peacekeepers are protecting more than 200,000 civilians who fled their homes and sought shelter at UN bases. Further south, peacekeepers are playing a critical role in **eastern Congo**, a region currently experiencing the second worst Ebola outbreak on record. In addition to their normal stabilization activities, peacekeepers are providing protection to health care workers and treatment centers, which have been targeted in attacks by armed groups, as well as logistical and operational support to Ebola response efforts.

All of these efforts advance our national security interests and promote core values that have long animated U.S. foreign policy and that members of this Subcommittee have sought to preserve. This is highlighted by the fact that the U.S.—including under the current Administration—has repeatedly voted at the Security Council to reauthorize these and other UN peacekeeping operations.

Of course, the UN's work in the field extends far beyond peacekeeping. The UN is also deeply involved in efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict that has raged in **Yemen** since 2015 and caused the world's most dire humanitarian crisis. Beyond the heroic efforts of the UN World Food Program (WFP), UN

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<sup>1</sup> Morjé Howard, Lise. "Give Peacekeeping a Chance." Oxford Research Group. <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/give-peacekeeping-a-chance>. 29 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "UN Peacekeeping Cost Estimate for Hypothetical U.S. Operation Exceeds Actual Costs for Comparable UN Operation." Government Accountability Office GAO-18-243. February 2018.

Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), and UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to feed twelve million people per month, respond to a massive cholera outbreak, and ensure women have access to maternal care, the UN has deployed a special political mission and special envoy to peacefully end the strife. This is no small task in what has become a complex and multi-faceted conflict involving an array of local interests, factions, and rival countries. In a recent op-ed published in *The Washington Post*, Ambassador William J. Burns, a former U.S. diplomat and current President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, endorsed the UN’s efforts, recommending that the Trump Administration “throw our full support behind” the UN-led framework for peace talks between the parties.

UN special political missions are actively working to resolve conflicts in a host of other countries as well. Take **Colombia** for example, where the UN has helped verify the disarmament and demobilization of FARC rebels as part of a landmark peace deal that ended the Western Hemisphere’s longest-running conflict, or **Afghanistan**, where the UN works alongside American diplomats on critical institution-building, narcotics control, and anti-corruption efforts. Recently, there has been some progress in U.S.-Taliban peace talks. Should a peace deal be reached between the parties, **it will be even more essential to have the UN political mission on the ground working to shape intra-Afghan talks, help the international community navigate Afghanistan’s complex political landscape, and liaise with powerful regional stakeholders like Pakistan.**

Political missions are financed through, and comprise a large portion of, the UN Regular Budget (UNRB). Like the UN’s peacekeeping budget, it is funded by assessments on UN member states. U.S. contributions to the UNRB are included under the CIO account, an account that for just under one-quarter of the annual budget of the state of Rhode Island, funds U.S. assessments for more than 40 international organizations. This includes the WHO, which has been responding to the second largest outbreak of **Ebola on record in DR Congo as well as the coronavirus (COVID-19)**, all while they’re helping lead efforts to end the scourge of polio forever.

In addition to assessed payments, the U.S. makes substantial voluntary contributions to the UN system, funding that is critical to the UN’s humanitarian and development work around the globe. Each year, because of U.S. financial support, the WFP delivers food aid to 91 million people in 83 countries and UNHCR assists more than 70 million refugees and displaced persons. Beyond the overall numbers, I have seen all of this up close and the impact on families and communities. In **Niger**, I saw what WFP Director, and former South Carolina governor, David Beasley called the “miracle in Maradi”: land that had been dust just a few years ago was now bearing sorghum and millet, which resulted in more livestock, reduced conflict over resources, increased attendance rates for children at school, and reductions in seasonal migration. In **Iraq**, UNHCR and UNDP have worked together to weaken the influence of ISIS by helping people return home and begin rebuilding their communities. In **Rwanda**, UNICEF has partnered with the private sector to develop early childhood development centers to help working parents and at-risk children live healthier and more productive lives. In **Jordan**, UNFPA – even though the U.S. has cut-off funding - has safely delivered more than 10,000 babies in the largest refugee camp there with zero maternal mortality.

Funding for these activities comes from a number of different sources, but the State Department’s relatively modest IO&P account helps anchor U.S. voluntary contributions to the UN, providing funding to the core budgets of a number of UN agencies and offices, including UNICEF, UNDP, and UN Women.

### **The Challenge of a Rising China and U.S. Retreat from Multilateralism**

Over the last seven decades, the U.S.-UN relationship has gone through its share of peaks and valleys. However, the last several years have seen a number of new challenges emerge. Since FY'17, Congress has enforced a 25% cap on U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, meaning that we have not been paying our dues at the full assessed rate even though U.S. diplomats signed off on those assessment rates at the UN. As a result, the U.S. has to date amassed nearly \$1 billion in peacekeeping arrears. In addition, the Trump Administration has taken a number of unilateral actions against specific UN bodies and agreements, including unprecedented delays in providing funding already appropriated by Congress to a range of UN agencies, which can have serious impacts on the ground. For example, [East Africa is experiencing the biggest locust outbreak in decades](#), a region where nearly 20 million people already face high levels of food insecurity. As it stands though, significant amounts of 2018 and 2019 Congressionally appropriated dollars to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – funds the agency could repurpose to combat the spread of locusts and the agricultural damage they cause - has been inexplicably delayed. On top of this, the Administration is withholding funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and, as noted above, UNFPA; gave up the U.S. seat on the UN Human Rights Council; and initiated the process of withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, a landmark agreement that seeks to bring the world together to avert the worst effects of climate change.

The consequences of these decisions are troublesome enough on their own. With regards to peacekeeping, U.S. underpayments are contributing to yawning cash deficits at the UN, with countries who participate in peacekeeping missions not being fully reimbursed for their contributions of personnel and equipment. This creates significant challenges for troop-contributors, most of whom are lower-income countries that rely on reimbursements to help sustain complex longer-term peacekeeping deployments, **which the State Department itself acknowledged in a June 2019 report to Congress.**

An additional complicating factor is that these problematic policy decisions are being implemented at a time when China is taking on an expanded and increasingly assertive role in the multilateral system, filling vacuums left by the U.S. and using its newfound influence to challenge the dominance of American interests and values. Members of this Subcommittee may be surprised to learn that China is now the second largest financial contributor to UN assessed budgets, providing 12% of the Regular Budget and more than 15% of the peacekeeping budget. It is also the 10<sup>th</sup> largest contributor of uniformed personnel to peacekeeping operations, outpacing all contributions by the other four permanent members of the Security Council combined.

Beyond financial and troop contributions, China has also aggressively pushed to expand its role in a range of UN-affiliated institutions, installing Chinese nationals at the helm of four of the organization's fifteen specialized agencies. Unfortunately, this is happening at a time when the State Department, and especially the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, is suffering from serious staffing shortages, thereby limiting our ability to push back against China's efforts or support our own preferred candidates for these positions. For example, there has long been a unit within the Bureau responsible for helping to promote jobs for Americans in international organizations. According to *Foreign Policy*, that office was shrunk from five employees to zero last year, putting the U.S. at a severe disadvantage in the competition over coveted posts in the UN system.

While greater Chinese participation at the UN, and a greater share of the financial burden, are not negative outcomes in their own right, the way China has sought to use its growing clout is far from benign, particularly in terms of the organization's work on human rights. At the Human Rights Council, for example, China is advocating a much narrower view of international human rights norms that devalues minority rights, elevates a narrow conception of "state sovereignty" over the rights of the individual, gives primacy to economic and social rights over civil and political rights, and seeks to mute criticism of individual countries' human rights records, particularly its own. While this runs directly counter to U.S. views, we are no longer a member of the Council and therefore limited in our ability to push back. In addition, beginning in 2020, for the first time in nearly a quarter century, **no American will have a seat on any UN human rights treaty body**. This weakens our ability to influence international law and fundamental freedoms at the global level.

Outside of Geneva, Beijing's efforts to circumscribe the UN's human rights work have seeped into the budget process. In June 2018, for example, during peacekeeping budget negotiations, China pushed for the elimination of a number of human rights monitoring and civilian protection posts. That same year, China and Russia successfully sought to cut funding for the Human Rights Upfront Initiative, a program in the Secretary-General's office that sought to ensure that all UN entities are prioritizing human rights in their field operations. More recently, during Regular Budget negotiations in the General Assembly in December 2019, Chinese and Russian diplomats put forward a raft of proposals to cut funding to OHCHR or otherwise hamstring its operations. While these efforts have met with varying degrees of success, the fact that they have even been tried in the first place is evidence of an emboldened China that is increasingly willing to use its influence—particularly its growing financial clout—to tilt the field in order to achieve the policy outcomes it desires. Sadly, this shift has coincided with, and been abetted by, the current Administration's own insistence on cutting UN budgets, reducing the number of personnel engaged on international organization matters, withdrawing from key bodies, and withholding necessary funds.

**The Administration's approach to these issues is all the more puzzling given that it has demonstrated a recognition of the extent of the problem. Indeed, in January, the State Department announced the appointment of a new special envoy whose sole job is to counter Chinese influence at the UN and other international organizations. While this move may be commendable on its face, the Administration's policies to date are counterproductive to those goals, effectively forcing the new special envoy to fight with both hands tied behind his back.**

If the U.S. continues to downgrade its engagement with the UN, it will leave a void that countries like China have shown they are more than willing, and increasingly able, to fill. That could mean a very different UN than the one the U.S. sought to create 75 years ago—one where U.S. foreign policy objectives, particularly our longstanding commitment to advancing universal human rights, are increasingly sidelined. Preventing such a scenario requires more engagement, not less, and that means fully meeting our financial obligations to the UN, including by lifting the peacekeeping cap and restoring funding for OHCHR. It also calls for enhanced U.S. participation in UN human rights bodies and other forums where U.S. interests and values are at stake.