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# United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding to the UN System

Congress is responsible for authorizing and appropriating funding to the United Nations (UN) system. Since the United Nations was founded in 1945, the United States has historically been the single largest financial contributor. The current status of U.S. funding to many UN bodies remains unclear; in February 2025, President Trump ordered a review (still pending) of U.S. participation in and funding of international organizations (IOs), and has since withdrawn the United States from several UN entities. The President's U.S. FY2026 budget request would eliminate funding to most UN bodies, including the UN regular budget and UN peacekeeping operations. The Administration has also delayed or halted some payments to UN entities and requested rescission of selected UN funding previously enacted by Congress.

## UN Background and Funding

Broadly, the UN system comprises interconnected entities, including the United Nations, UN specialized agencies, UN funds and programs, and UN peacekeeping operations. The UN Charter, a treaty ratified by the United States in 1945, requires each member to contribute to the expenses of the organization. UN members may lose their vote in the 193-member General Assembly if they accumulate “arrears” (outstanding balances) equal to or exceeding the amount of contributions due in the previous two years.

**Types of Funding.** The UN system is financed primarily by two types of contributions. *Assessed contributions* are required dues, the payment of which is a legal obligation accepted by a country when it becomes a member. Such funding provides UN entities with a regular income to pay for staff and implement core programs. The UN regular budget, specialized agencies, and peacekeeping operations are all financed mainly by assessed funding. *Voluntary contributions* are provided to any UN entity at the discretion of governments, and primarily fund certain UN funds and programs, such as the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program (WFP).

**UN Regular Budget.** The UN regular budget funds the core costs of the organization, including the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and Secretariat. It is adopted by the General Assembly and covers one UN fiscal year (January 1-December 31). Most budget-related Assembly decisions are adopted by consensus; when such votes occur (which is rare), decisions are made by a two-thirds majority. The Assembly determines a regular budget scale of assessments every three years based on a country’s capacity to pay. The United States is assessed 22% of the budget, followed by China (20.0%) and Japan (6.9%). For 2026, UN Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres proposed a revised regular budget of \$3.24 billion. The proposed budget would represent a 15% decrease from the 2025 funding level of \$3.72 billion.

**UN Specialized Agencies.** The 15 UN specialized agencies, which include the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization (WHO), among others, are autonomous in executive, legislative, and budgetary powers. Some agencies follow the scale of assessment for the UN regular budget, while others use their own formulas to determine assessments. The United States is a member of 12 of the 15 UN specialized agencies. The Trump Administration has initiated the one-year withdrawal process from WHO and withdrawn the United States from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

**UN Peacekeeping Funding.** There are 11 UN peacekeeping missions worldwide with over 60,000 personnel. The UN Security Council establishes and/or renews each operation, and the UN General Assembly approves the UN peacekeeping budget. The peacekeeping scale of assessments is based on modifications of the UN regular budget scale, with the five permanent council members assessed at a higher level than for the regular budget. The U.S. peacekeeping assessment is 26.15%; however, in 1994 Congress capped the U.S. contribution at 25%. China (23.78%) and Japan (6.93%) have the next highest assessment rates. The 2025-2026 UN peacekeeping budget (with a fiscal year of July 1-June 30) is \$5.4 billion. In October 2025, the UNSG requested that all peacekeeping missions reduce expenditures by 15% to address budget shortfalls (see below **text box**) and repatriate 25% of uniformed personnel.

## UN Budget Shortfalls

For nearly a decade, both the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets have periodically experienced funding shortfalls, including a “liquidity crisis” the UNSG has attributed to delayed or nonpayments from certain UN members (primarily the United States and at times China). In 2019 and 2022, the General Assembly adopted several budgeting reforms; however, liquidity issues remain. In May and October 2025, the UNSG stated that the United Nations will be on a “path to bankruptcy” if UN members do not pay their dues in full and on time. He proposed cuts to UN staff, the aforementioned reductions to UN peacekeeping, and additional financial reforms. Some of these proposals are currently being considered by the General Assembly.

## U.S. Funding Mechanisms

U.S. funding to the United Nations is authorized under the United Nations Participation Act of 1945 (P.L. 79-264, as amended). Funding authorizations for certain UN bodies are also included in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195, as amended). Congress has historically appropriated both assessed and voluntary UN funding in annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts (in the

119<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House renamed its SFOPS act as the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Act).

**U.S. Assessed Funding.** U.S. assessed contributions have typically been provided through two SFOPS accounts: *Contributions to International Organizations* (CIO), which funds assessed contributions to the UN regular budget, UN specialized agencies, and other international organizations (IOs), and *Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities* (CIPA), which funds U.S. assessments to most UN peacekeeping operations.

**U.S. Voluntary Funding.** The *International Organizations & Programs* (IO&P) SFOPS account has traditionally funded mostly core voluntary contributions to UN funds and programs and other IOs. The United States has also provided UN voluntary funding through other SFOPS accounts such as *Migration and Refugee Assistance* (MRA), *International Disaster Assistance* (IDA), and *Economic Support Fund* (ESF). Congress has generally appropriated overall funding to each of these accounts, while the executive branch determined how funds were allocated based on policy priorities and specific needs.

**U.S. Withholdings.** The United States often accumulates outstanding balances (also referred to as “arrears”) to UN bodies for a range of reasons, including U.S. withholdings (such as legislative restrictions related to the Palestinians and UN peacekeeping funding), and delayed payments (such as differences between the U.S. and UN fiscal years). Due to UN withholdings by President Reagan in the 1980s, the State Department also pays certain assessments on a deferred basis, causing some U.S. funding to be delayed by a year. As of October 9, 2025 (latest publicly available data), U.S. unpaid assessments were \$1.5 billion for the UN regular budget and \$2.4 billion for UN peacekeeping.

## Recent U.S. Funding Actions

**FY2026 Budget Request.** The Trump Administration’s FY2026 budget request for CIO is \$263.8 million. This request totals 83% less than the FY2025 pre-rescission funding level of \$1.54 billion (see “Rescissions and Selected Payments” for more information). The budget request notes that CIO funding was “to support [IOs] that make America safer and more secure.” These include the International Atomic Energy Agency, International Civil Aviation Organization, and International Telecommunications Union, among others. The request states that any additional funding would depend on the outcome of the Administration’s pending review of U.S. participation in and funding of IOs. The Administration did not request any FY2026 funding for the CIPA account to pay U.S. assessments to UN peacekeeping, citing “ongoing mission failures” and “disproportionately high” U.S. assessments. For FY2025, Congress appropriated \$1.23 billion to CIPA in pre-rescission funding.

The FY2026 request also proposed eliminating IO&P funding “due to the U.S.’s high fiscal burden ... compared to other nations.” For FY2025, Congress appropriated \$436.92 million in voluntary funding to IO&P, which it rescinded in July 2025. It is unclear to CRS to what extent, if any, the Administration might allocate voluntary funding to UN entities through other accounts.

**Rescissions and Selected Payments.** In May 2025, the President proposed \$7.9 billion in rescissions from previously enacted FY2024 and FY2025 SFOPS Acts, some of which included UN-related funding. In July of the same year, Congress enacted P.L. 119-28, which rescinded FY2024 and FY2025 appropriations totaling \$201.8 million from CIO and \$361.2 million from CIPA. P.L. 119-28 also rescinded \$436.9 million in FY2025 IO&P funding, which zeroed out the account (Table 1.) Separately, in October 2025 the Administration transferred about \$680 million in remaining FY2025 CIPA funding to the United Nations.

**Table 1. U.S. Funding: Select UN-Related Accounts**

(Millions of current U.S. dollars)				
	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 Enacted <sup>a</sup>	FY2025 Enacted <sup>a</sup>	FY2026 Request
CIO	1,438	1,510	1,374	264
CIPA	1,482	1,164	1,076	0
IO&P	508	437	0	0

**Sources:** Annual congressional budget justifications and SFOPS bills.

**Notes:** Amounts have been rounded up.

a. Funding levels include rescissions per P.L. 119-28.

## Selected Congressional Issues

**U.S. Assessment Levels.** For several decades, some policymakers have debated U.S. assessment levels, which are the highest of any UN member. Some express concern that the United States provides the bulk of funding to UN entities (particularly the regular budget) while having minimal influence on the budget process. Others contend that U.S. assessments reflect a longstanding U.S. commitment to the United Nations, affirm U.S. global leadership, and encourage other countries to contribute.

**Impact of U.S. Financial Withholdings.** Congress might consider the implications of the United States conditioning or withholding funding to UN bodies. For example, some maintain that such actions might provide an opportunity for other countries, particularly China, to step into the UN funding and leadership role traditionally held by the United States. U.S. withholdings can also affect UN operations (including payments to peacekeeping troops) and the broader financial stability of the UN system. Conversely, others suggest that the United States should use its position as a top financial contributor to push for certain reforms to improve organization effectiveness, fund specific UN bodies and activities prioritized by the United States, and/or defund those contrary to U.S. interests.

**Role of Congress and the Executive Branch.** Historically, Congress has not specifically appropriated funding to many UN bodies. This has given the executive branch some leeway to determine how funds are allocated, often with little or no congressional consultation. Some Members might consider to what extent, if any, Congress may legislate funding levels for specific UN bodies, while others may prefer to maintain the status quo to allow for flexibility in how funds are used.

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