



**ADVANCING AMERICAN
FREEDOM FOUNDATION**

TESTIMONY

Edwin Meese III Institute for the Rule of Law

No. 1 | April 29, 2026

Pressure Points for an Organization Built for Nonaccountability

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**Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Oversight & Intelligence:**

“U.S. Accountability at the United Nations: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform”

April 29, 2026

Chairman Mills, Ranking Member Moskowitz, and honorable members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about how to reform the United Nations.

Though the United States is by far the largest funder, as well as the physical host, of the United Nations, it is typically on the losing end of most contested U.N. General Assembly votes.¹ As the 2026 State Department Strategic Plan states, the United Nations “has strayed far from its purpose of solving international disputes peacefully.” The U.N.’s principal organ for assuring international peace, the Security Council, is increasingly detached from the real-world power structure that originally justified it. Russia and China’s veto will prevent most U.S.-backed initiatives, but it at least tracks those nations’ global power. The presence of the former imperial powers United Kingdom and France on the Council is an anachronism, and one that makes the Council even less suitable for U.S. policy as our interests and Europe’s increasingly diverge. Yet given since the U.N. Charter is a multilateral treaty, we are stuck with constitutional design features that reflect the world of 1945, not today.

Congress has been discussing the U.N.’s lack of accountability for decades.² Yet Turtle Bay’s budget increases almost ineluctably. U.S. funding has roughly doubled in the past decade – and this is despite historically unprecedented cuts under President Trump. Without durable reform, this trend will continue, with occasional downticks during presidencies like the current one.

¹ U.S. Department of State, “Report to Congress on Voting Practices in the United Nations for 2024,” July 2025, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Voting-Practices-in-the-United-Nations-for-2024.pdf>.

² See, e.g., United Nations reform: hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-sixth Congress, first session (October 26, 1979).

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The U.N. is designed for maximum non-accountability. With nearly two-hundred member states, treaty-level reform is impossible. And because the U.N. is a supernational entity, the monitoring and agency problems inherent in government are greatly magnified. These problems are endemic to international organizations (IOs). Often exit is the only real constraint on such entities – take, for instance, the departure of the U.K. from the European Union, or several countries from the International Criminal Court. But leaving the U.N. is a political nonstarter, and Turtle Bay’s awareness of this further emboldens it.

Most U.N. reform efforts over the years have focused on cutting or withholding funds.³ Ongoing withholdings by the Trump Administration have succeeded in getting the U.N. to trim its budget by 15%.⁴ This should be applauded. But history shows that the U.N. often relapses when a less determined administration comes into office. For example, the Reagan-era Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment reforms, which required consensus on the U.N. budget, were eventually dropped by Congress, and the U.N. quickly resumed its prior profligacy.

There is a clear mismatch between the United States’ importance to the U.N. and its ability to influence it. In the General Assembly, it has only somewhat more clout than any other country. U.N. secretaries-general can serve a decade in office, so they seek to wait out troublesome presidents. That is why the U.S. must focus on what it can do unilaterally that would make a lasting difference. The remainder of my testimony will focus on three discrete methods to lock in change. This means looking not just where the problems are, but where the pressure points are.

Veto peacekeeping missions

Most bloated, politicized, or simply ineffective U.N. entities – from the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to the Human Rights Council – cannot be cancelled by the United States. Peacekeeping is the exception. Peacekeeping missions typically require annual reauthorization by the Security Council, which means the United States can unilaterally terminate any peacekeeping mission, using its veto power. Once vetoed, a peacekeeping mission cannot be resurrected without a new affirmative Security Council authorization. Peacekeeping is one of the biggest line items in the U.N.’s budget, and the United States pays the lion’s share, despite Congress legislating a 25 percent budget cap on U.S. contributions. Notably, the United Nations’ peacekeeping budget is separate from the general budget that is funded from assessed contributions.

To be sure, peacekeeping missions have played valuable roles at certain junctures. But like many U.N. entities, they continue to exist long after any real need for them has ended because no one has a strong incentive to close them. Indeed, the U.N. derives influence and patronage opportunities from these missions, whose “blue helmets” make the organization seem like a real power, while providing U.S.-subsidized deployments for third-world militaries.

Perhaps the most egregious of these is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), created to supervise a long-forgotten ceasefire between Israel and the PLO. Mission creep has kept it around for nearly half a century. It has categorically failed at its task of disarming Hezbollah, instead becoming a human shield for it.⁵ President Trump and Ambassador Mike Waltz did the right thing,

³ See <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/04/05/the-urgent-need-for-un-reform/>.

⁴ Josh Christenson, “US ambassadors reveal how they slashed UN budget: ‘Never seen anything like it,’” *New York Post*, January 18, 2026, <https://nypost.com/2026/01/18/us-news/us-ambassadors-reveal-how-they-slashed-un-budget/>.

⁵ Eugene Kontorovich, “Time to shut down the failed U.N. Lebanon mission,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 18, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/time-to-shut-down-the-failed-u-n-lebanon-mission-7075a0f>; Eugene Kontorovich, “Trump Should Fire the U.N. Forces in Lebanon,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 16, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/trump-should->

using a threatened U.S. veto to negotiate a wind-down for the mission, which is scheduled to depart at the end of the year. This was a path-breaking action by President Trump, and as the new peace negotiations between Lebanon and Israel show, the “peacekeepers” were not creating peace, they were, if anything, blocking it. Prior administrations had used the threat of a veto to force some cosmetic reforms that were quickly abandoned. The only real tool is closure. Even with UNIFIL, we should also expect a last-ditch push by France and other countries to try to win a reprieve for organization.⁶

The approach the Administration took to UNIFIL should be a template for other missions. Other obsolete missions include the U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights. MINURSO was deployed in 1991 to supervise a referendum on the status of the territory. That vote never took place, but the blue helmets remain. Subsequent events, such as the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty by the U.S. and many other states, have made the mission entirely superfluous. UNDOF is supposed to supervise a ceasefire between Israel and Syria, but its observers have always fled during major rounds of conflict. Their failure to maintain the demilitarization required between the countries led Israel to secure the area itself, and UNDOF currently has no real role. While cancelling these missions will not bring massive cost savings, it will show the U.N. bureaucracy that the U.S. is not interested in reauthorizing programs merely out of habit or inertia – and that it is willing to use its veto to shake things up.

It is also worth mentioning the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Jerusalem, which was originally sent to monitor an armistice during Israel’s War of Independence in 1948. Given the peace treaty between Jerusalem and Amman, and America’s recognition of Israeli sovereignty throughout Jerusalem, UNTSO has little to do but file negative reports about Israeli policies. Yet unlike almost every other subsequently created U.N. peacekeeping mission, it is not subject to annual reauthorization (or veto) by the Security Council. This makes it maximally unaccountable – and politicized. As the U.N.’s oldest peacekeeping mission, it symbolizes the stubborn inertia, anti-Israel bias, and mission creep of the agency. The U.S. can end UNTSO indirectly by using its veto over other missions as leverage to demand its termination.

Other missions should be ended because of their persistent wrongdoing. Two central African missions - the U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) - have for years accounted for the overwhelming majority of sex-abuse claims against peacekeepers.

Exit specialized agencies and ICJ jurisdiction

The United Nations is not just one organization. It is a web of international organizations – specialized agencies, related organizations, and other entities.⁷ President Trump ended U.S. participation in approximately 30 such programs in January.⁸ This was the most comprehensive

fire-the-un-forces-in-lebanon-blocking-israel-from-fighting-hezbollah-63d91115; Eugene Kontorovich, “After Tragedy in Beirut, End Lebanon’s U.N. Farce,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 20, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/after-tragedy-in-beirut-end-lebanons-u-n-farce-11597877742>.

⁶ “UN might keep presence in south Lebanon once UNIFIL mandate ends, says official,” *The Times of Israel*, April 23, 2026, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-might-keep-presence-in-south-lebanon-once-unifil-mandate-ends-says-official/>.

⁷ The United Nations System Chart, available at <https://www.un.org/en/delegate/page/un-system-chart>.

⁸ “Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States” (official memorandum, The White House, 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states>.

retrenchment of U.S. engagement in such entities ever. But almost all of these bodies are components of the U.N. itself and therefore do not have separate membership processes. The U.S. can opt not to attend or engage with them, but cannot quit unless it quits the U.N. itself.

However, there is a class of U.N. organizations and entities that have their own separate constitutive treaties and membership processes, most saliently, the specialized agencies. They are major auxiliaries of the U.N. that expand its activities into specific subject-matter areas. Because one can quit these entities separately, they offer a scalable tool for reducing our ties with the United Nations. While some of the U.N. affiliates, like the International Civil Aviation Organization or the Universal Postal Union, focus on narrow technical matters in a professional manner, other legacy organizations have become bloated or politicized. Yet like little-used online subscriptions, America's membership in such organizations proceeds through inertia.

President Trump has begun a much-needed process of reevaluating U.S. memberships and has already taken the United States out of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). But there are still many opportunities to end U.S. participation in outdated agencies. Here are several examples. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which the U.S. funds with approximately \$1.7 billion a year, was established in 1951 to help displaced persons after World War II, but it went on to find other missions for itself. Now it sponsors the Global Compact for Migration, which the U.S. has described as “not compatible with U.S. sovereignty,”⁹ and which promotes a largely pro-migration “rights-based” agenda, as well as sponsoring progressive programs like “Strengthening Women’s Resilience in the Face of Climate Change in El Salvador.” If the U.S. does not formally exit the IOM, it will in the future likely find itself sucked into the Global Compact itself.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) was founded over 100 years ago and does not make sense in a radically different global labor environment. Now it funds woke causes like jobs training for transgender people in Brazil with no obvious connection to the U.S. national interest.¹⁰ The U.S. quit this organization in 1977 with little apparent negative consequence for U.S. workers, and could do so again as part of a broad downsizing of the U.N. system. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has been one of the less politicized specialized agencies. But in recent years it has been promoting an unprecedented scheme for a global carbon tax on shipping. The United States succeeded in stopping this initiative last year,¹¹ but the European Union continues to actively promote it in the IMO.¹² The only way the Trump Administration can prevent such a globalist tax

⁹ “United States Ends Participation in Global Compact on Migration,” (statement, Department of State, 2017), <https://2017-2021-translations.state.gov/2017/12/02/united-states-ends-participation-in-global-compact-on-migration/#:~:text=Today%2C%20the%20U.S.%20Mission%20to,at%20the%20UN%20in%202018>.

¹⁰ “New ILO initiative to develop professional skills and promote rights, equity and inclusion of transgender people in the world of work,” *International Labour Organization*, January 27, 2022, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/new-ilo-initiative-develop-professional-skills-and-promote-rights-equity>.

¹¹ “Taking Action to Defend America from the UN’s First Global Carbon Tax – the International Maritime Organization’s (IMO) “Net-Zero Framework” (NZF),” (statement, Department of States, 2025), <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/10/taking-action-to-defend-america-from-the-uns-first-global-carbon-tax-the-international-maritime-organizations-imo-net-zero-framework-nzf>.

¹² Sara Schonhardt, “US official: No hope for global carbon tax,” *Politico*, April 24, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/04/24/us-official-no-hope-for-global-carbon-tax-00890085>.

being imposed on American shippers during a future administration is to take the U.S. out of the IMO now.

Finally, the U.S. cannot quit the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is an integral part of the UN. However, it can minimize its exposure to lawfare in The Hague by exiting treaties that grant the tribunal jurisdiction. The ICJ has become entirely politicized, and consistently hostile to U.S. interests. For example, it has issued rulings declaring climate change an international law violation and demanding that the United Kingdom end its sovereignty over Diego Garcia, site of a vital U.S. base. U.S. consent to ICJ jurisdiction has led to rulings against it in cases involving the use of armed force brought by Nicaragua in the 1980's and several recent rulings attacking sanctions that the U.S. imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The U.S. no longer agrees to ICJ jurisdictional clauses in new treaties, using reservations upon signing or ratification to opt out of the relevant provisions. However, we are still party to some older agreements that contain compromissory clauses that could be used for lawfare purposes against the United States. All U.S. treaties should be audited for such provisions. While a state cannot retroactively opt out of such provisions in treaties already in force, it can achieve the same result by quitting a treaty and then immediately rejoining with the appropriate reservations.

Cancel statutory authorizations for membership

Exiting U.N. commitments and memberships made under various treaties, as discussed in Part II, should a powerful mechanism of resetting America's U.N. exposure, because such exits should not be immediately reversible by unilateral executive action. Under our constitutional system, joining treaty-based international organizations is supposed to be easier than exiting. Under the Treaty Clause, international commitments are difficult to make, and easier to walk away from. This is an important safeguard to prevent international commitments from being used as to short-circuit or bypass the domestic political process. However, in recent decades there has been some erosion of the constitutional norms that would require new legislative votes to rejoin U.N. entities. Congress must reassert its prerogatives in this area. Otherwise, U.N. treaties become a dreary version of Hotel California, where one can check out anytime but never really leave.

When President Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO and UNESCO, it was the second time the U.S. had withdrawn from the WHO and the third time for UNESCO. The U.S. first joined UNESCO in 1946 and the WHO in 1948, President Truman acted pursuant to laws passed by both Houses authorizing him to do so.¹³ Yet when President Biden sought to rejoin UNESCO in 2023, he neglected to seek new authorization from Congress.¹⁴ Membership in international organizations was not supposed to be a political revolving door – subsequent memberships require new, independent congressional authorizations. Under the Constitution, the President can only join a treaty with the “consent” of two-thirds of the Senate. However, with the proliferation of

¹³ See 22 U.S.C. §§ 287m–287s (Unesco); (22 U.S.C. § 290(a)–(b) (WHO).

¹⁴ The argument that congressional-executive agreements to join an IO create perpetual authorization was first made by President Jimmy Carter, who purported to rejoin the ILO in 1980 based on a 1934 authorization. Similarly, President George W. Bush neglected to seek congressional approval when he rejoined UNESCO in 2002. However, two obscure contemporary actions do not establish a constitutional rule.

international agreements in the twentieth century, presidents have increasingly relied on what is known as a “congressional-executive agreement,” whereby both houses vote by simple majorities to approve an agreement in lieu of Senate ratification.

If the U.S. quits a treaty that had been ratified by the Senate, a subsequent rejoining would be subject to separate Advice and Consent requirement. In the congressional-executive agreement model, congress’s assent serves as a substitute for Senate ratification. Renewed congressional assent for a congressional-executive agreement should be required whenever senate re-ratification would. Consider a parallel case: if a president fires a senate-confirmed appointee, and he or a subsequent president wishes to restore him to the same post, he would have to again get Senate consent. Indeed, Henry Stanbery, Andrew Johnson’s Attorney General, resigned from his position to defend Johnson in his impeachment trial. He was then renominated by Johnson to serve a second time as attorney general – only to be rejected by the Senate. As a statutory matter, the 1946 and 1948 laws allowed the president to “accept membership” – not accept, and accept, and accept again.

Congress should repeal the antiquated authorizations for UNESCO and the WHO now that the U.S. is not a member. If a subsequent president wants to rejoin, Congress should have the opportunity to evaluate membership based on the organization’s record as it stands at the time.