

**The United States and the United Nations:
A Case of Ambivalent Multilateralism**

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The establishment of the United Nations in the closing days of World War II was an expression by war-weary nations, led by the United States, for a new global organization to promote international peace and security and to foster the social and economic conditions necessary for peace to prevail. More than half a century later, following the Cold War, decolonization, a tripling of member states, and the transformation of the global economy, the United Nations endures as the world community's central institution, providing essential global public goods and a universal forum in which to address transnational problems through norm and standard-setting.

Since the Cold War's end, the UN has been more in demand than ever to deal with ethnic conflicts, failing states, complex humanitarian disasters, expanding human rights, and democratic transitions. The complex UN system is actively engaged in global efforts to address a wide range of transnational problems such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, AIDS, population growth, and terrorism that mark a world of rising interdependence and globalization. Global conferences have been convened to address many of these issues and have spurred the development of global civil society by facilitating the growth and networking of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Yet, the UN has also been marginalized in the governance of global economic relations with the IMF, World Bank, G-8, and other institutions playing central roles.

As a set of institutions that has grown up over more than fifty years, the UN has suffered from chronic shortages of resources and is in need of substantial reform. Change is needed in core structures such as the Security Council and ECOSOC to reflect the enlarged membership. Many programs and agencies need systematic review, elimination or restructuring to reduce redundancy, politicization, and waste. The reform issues also include the need for greater transparency of operations, enhanced coordination especially among specialized agencies, and overhaul of staffing and management practices. And, the UN's chronic funding problems need to be addressed. The last Charter reform took place in 1971. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is responsible for a series of well-regarded management reforms begun in 1997. Yet, much remains to be done to strengthen the UN's capacity to manage demands for complex peacekeeping operations, to enhance the efficient use of scarce resources, the professionalism of staff, and coordination among multiple departments, agencies, and programs with overlapping mandates.

Despite the critical role the United Nations plays in addressing interdependence issues and threats to peace and security, the United States has fluctuated in its commitment to multilateralism through the UN. It has demonstrated little vision for strengthening the UN's role or its own leadership. It has periodically tried to use its power as leading financial contributor to secure reforms that enhance its control over the organization. It has seldom advocated reforms that would strengthen the UN's capacity or the legitimacy of its key organs. Indeed, U.S. actions in the past decade have weakened the United Nations even as the world body has become increasingly indispensable. This failure of leadership is most apparent in the realm of UN financing. By withholding contributions since the 1980s, continually escalating demands for reforms in UN administration and budgeting, and attempting through unilateral demands to reduce its assessments, the United States has exacerbated the UN's financial crisis and eroded its own credibility.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the fluctuating relationship between the United States and United Nations. It notes that although the United States has often used the UN as a valuable tool of its foreign policy, it has sometimes regarded the UN as a hostile place where others pushed issues antithetical to U.S. interests. The chapter then turns to the issue of UN financing, which has become a bellwether for the overall U.S.-UN relationship in the last fifteen years and is central both to the UN's own future and the effectiveness of American leadership within that institution. The chapter traces the erosion of the U.S. commitment to payment of UN dues as a legal obligation and it examines the increasing tendency of Congress to use financing issues to micro-manage UN reform efforts. It seeks to explain the roots of U.S. actions. Where on the one hand, the U.S. strong liberal and idealist traditions have drawn it to support the UN, on the other hand, U.S. power, domestic politics, "exceptionalism," and politics within the UN itself have been key factors leading to ambivalence or skepticism about the UN's value. The chapter assesses the consequences of the U.S. unilateral posture in the late 1990s regarding UN financing, arguing that U.S. unilateralism has undermined both its national interests and the health of the world body. Finally, it calls for a new vision to guide American leadership and interests in multilateralism through the UN in the 21st century.

Evolution of the U.S.-UN Relationship

The United Nations is in many respects an American creation. In 1945, the United States, supported by the Allied powers and a number of smaller states, provided both vision and resources for the UN's development. The American vision was rooted in the country's tradition of idealism and its historic sense of its own exceptionalism. The idea of a universal organization for peace and security was first articulated by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I in proposing the League of Nations and subsequently adapted by Franklin D. Roosevelt in designing the post-World War II world. The blueprints for a United Nations Organization that emerged from negotiations at Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco in 1944-5 bore the stamp of American postwar planners.

During the Cold War, the United Nations was largely marginalized from dealing with many threats to international peace and security. Yet, the United States sought to use the UN and its agencies as instruments of its national policies wherever possible. It was particularly useful for collective legitimation of actions such as the U.S.-led response in Korea in 1950 and the censure of Soviet aggression in Hungary in 1956 and Afghanistan in 1979. The invention of peacekeeping provided a means of dealing with certain regional conflicts. The United States also valued the activities of specialized UN agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The membership increases that accompanied decolonization, however, made it more difficult for the United States to use the UN as an instrument of its policies and, consequently, made it less interested in strengthening the capacities of the world body. Developing countries' interests frequently diverged from those of the United States. As shown in Figure 1, the frequency with which the United States voted with the majority of states in the General Assembly steadily dropped. In the 1970s, Third World demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the politicization of issues such as apartheid in South Africa,

Palestinian rights, and the Arab-Israeli conflict put the United States in a defensive, often isolated position, and led the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Daniel Patrick Moynahan, to label the United Nations a "hostile place."

Efforts to promote international regulation of transnational corporations, attacks on market capitalism, statist approaches to economic development, the creation of new organs, and mounting evidence of bloated, biased, and inefficient secretariats in such agencies as the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) eroded U.S. support for the UN. The United States withdrew from the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1978 and from UNESCO in 1983. It opposed many UN-sponsored development programs and committed resources only selectively and intermittently to others. This growing American skepticism about the United Nations reached its apogee in the early 1980s. The Reagan Administration's antipathy toward multilateral institutions helped to create a sense of crisis for the UN system. Washington's alienation from the United Nations is borne out in the further steep drop in 1981 in U.S. voting with the General Assembly majority (see Figure 1). The same trend was evident in the Security Council, where the United States, having vetoed no resolutions from 1946 to 1965, vetoed 46 resolutions between 1966 and 1985, with 34 of those cast between 1976 and 1985.

U.S. antipathy to the United Nations moderated somewhat during the second term of the Reagan administration--even as Congress began unilaterally cutting U.S. financial contributions. Changes in Soviet policy under Mikhail Gorbachev created new opportunities for UN peacekeepers to help settle regional conflicts in Namibia, Central America, Afghanistan, and the Iran-Iraq war. Subsequently, the Gulf crisis in 1990-1 appeared to mark "a turning point in the U.S.-UN relationship."⁽¹⁾ The UN's successes in handling new peacekeeping challenges and the enforcement action in the Gulf, made possible by the post-Cold War cooperation of the five permanent members (P-5) of the Security Council, generated widespread optimism about an expanding UN role in the new post-Cold War era. Indicative of this trend was the fact that the P-5 cast only six vetoes between 1991 and 1998, of which three were by the U.S.

The United Nations was in greater demand to deal with peace and security issues as well as environmental and development issues, population growth, humanitarian disasters, human rights, and a seemingly ever-widening array of transnational issues. The number of UN peacekeeping operations doubled, and a series of UN-organized global conferences generated ambitious plans of action for addressing interdependence issues. At the request of the Security Council, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali drafted *An Agenda for Peace*, setting forth a vision of the possibilities for an enlarged UN role. The Bush administration applauded this expansive vision, terming the document an "extremely valuable contribution to the consideration—and actual construction—of the United Nations' future role in international security."⁽²⁾ In 1993, the Clinton administration articulated a foreign policy of "assertive multilateralism," designed to share responsibilities for global peace with other countries by working through an invigorated the UN.

Yet, on closer examination, the U.S.-UN relationship was much more mixed and fragile than the public rhetoric suggested. U.S. voting with the majority on roll call votes in the General Assembly reached its lowest point ever in 1990 (10 percent) and improved only modestly in

succeeding years (see Figure 1). The record on all resolutions, reflecting the large number approved by consensus, is much more positive, but still shows a downward trend through 1990, followed by an upward one. In contrast to its rhetoric about a “new world order” based on a stronger UN, the Bush administration demonstrated its own willingness to “go it alone” on a number of issues, for instance by refusing to become a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

American early post-Cold War optimism about the United Nations had diminished substantially by 1995 as the problems of peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia overshadowed successes elsewhere. The 1994 Presidential Decision Directive (PDD-25) outlined a more circumspect view of UN peacekeeping and U.S. participation. (See the Sewall chapter for further discussion of changing views on peacekeeping.) For the United States, the benefits of peacekeeping seemed lower and the costs and risks higher in the mid-1990s than they had been during the Cold War years. This shift coincided directly with the first use of U.S. troops in UN peacekeeping operations. U.S. willingness to “go it alone” was further evident in the unilateral effort to deny Boutros Boutros-Ghali a second term as UN Secretary-General, Washington’s refusal to sign the 1997 Land Mines Treaty and the 1998 Statute on an International Criminal Court, the Senate’s rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the country’s growing reliance on unilateral sanctions to deal with a broad array of foreign policy problems.⁽³⁾ The ambivalent multilateralism of the 1990s is especially curious since the United States’ own principles of democracy, human rights, and free markets had become widely accepted norms incorporated into UN agendas and programs.

American ambivalence towards the United Nations was nowhere more visible than in the deepening U.S. debt to the world organization. The pattern begun in the mid-1980s of withholding U.S. dues was never fully resolved. Indeed, Congress became increasingly resistant to meeting U.S. financial obligations to the UN, especially after the 1994 elections, when a Republican majority in the Congress faced off against a Democratic President. Partisanship joined with ambivalence and, in the words of one American commentator, multilateralism had become a “dirty word.”⁽⁴⁾ At the UN’s Fiftieth Anniversary in 1995, the organization faced a deep financial crisis triggered by the failure of many members, above all the United States, to pay their assessed contributions and by the absence of political will among members, including the United States, to enact necessary reforms in UN administration, financing, and structure to adapt the organization to the dramatically different world of the late 1990s.

The UN in the 1990s, then, was not the “hostile place” it had been in the 1970s and early 1980s for the United States—except as American unilateralist actions triggered anti-American reactions and antagonized even America’s closest allies. The difficulty is one of “reconciling America’s exceptional power and the politics of multilateral bodies,” according to Luck.⁽⁵⁾ Yet reconciling America’s notion of itself as an exceptional power with its interests in the value of multilateral institutions for sharing burdens and to address interdependence issues has proven problematic. Hence, financing UN operations and meeting U.S. obligations in this area has become a bellwether issue for the UN-U.S. relationship. The issue has affected and still affects the health of the organization as well as setting the agenda for and the tone of the UN-U.S. relationship.

Financing as a Bellwether Issue

Since the mid-1980s, U.S.-UN relations have been dominated by conflicts over how much should be spent on UN activities, what countries should pay what share, and the cost effectiveness of programs. In return for paying its dues, the United States has sought a de facto veto over UN activities and organizational reform, along with a reduction in its assessed share of expenses. A brief look at the history of UN financing provides insights into the relationship between the United States and the perennial problem of funding.

Financing the UN

Negotiators at the wartime conferences at Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco addressed issues of UN financing only late in the negotiations through two Charter provisions. Article 17 grants the General Assembly responsibility for budgeting and financing, while Article 19 provides that states in excessive arrears shall lose their vote in the General Assembly unless it is determined that failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the member's control. (6) At San Francisco, the United States agreed to pay almost 40 percent for the first years, a figure that was gradually lowered to 25 percent in 1973. The specific percentage was based roughly on a state's national income, per capita income, any economic dislocations, and foreign currency reserves. A separate scale of assessments for peacekeeping operations was established by the General Assembly in 1963, although it continued to be controversial for several years thereafter. The permanent members of the Security Council and the wealthier countries were to pay proportionately more, given both their economic means in the case of the latter and special responsibilities for the maintenance of peace and security, in the former. When this scale was reevaluated in 1973, the United States' figure was set at 31 percent.

During the period between 1946 and 1960, financing took backseat to the critical issues of the Cold War. Incremental administrative reforms were made to satisfy different constituencies--a process that Luck labels as "muddling through: reform as a way of life." (7) There were the occasional grumblings from members of Congress, warning against the dangers of the United States being "Santa Claus for the rest of the world." (8)

The first of the UN's three major financial crises occurred in the early 1960s as a result of controversies over UN peacekeeping operations in the Congo and the Middle East. Since both operations had been authorized by the General Assembly after the Security Council had vetoed proposed action, two permanent members--France and the Soviet Union--argued that General Assembly-authorized peacekeeping actions were not subject to compulsory financing. As UN debts mounted, the General Assembly in 1961 requested an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the interpretation of Article 17. Were peacekeeping expenses "expenses" of the organization under Article 17? Should such expenses be "borne by the Members as apportioned by the General Assembly?" If certain states were deemed in arrears, could Article 19 be enforced?

The United States led efforts to reinforce the legal basis of states' obligation to pay their assessed shares of UN expenses, including peacekeeping. It supported the World Court's decision in the *Certain Expenses* case which held that peacekeeping was an ordinary expense of

the organization, one that should be borne by all members.(9) Both the United Nations and the United States worked diligently toward a political compromise that would not jeopardize the UN as an organization. Bonds were sold to finance the peace operations and to make up for the budgetary shortfall, and consensus decision-making was instituted for the nineteenth General Assembly session in 1964 to avoid a showdown with the Soviet Union and France. In August 1965, faced with consensus that Article 19 should not be invoked and that the Assembly should return to normal voting procedures, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Arthur Goldberg articulated the American view that "the concept of collective financial responsibility. . . is a sound principle." Article 17 is "impeccably clear" and Article 19 "clear beyond question." But he demurred, "We must make it crystal clear that if any Member can insist on making an exception to the principle of collective financial responsibility with respect to certain activities of the Organization, the United States reserves the same option to make exception if, in our view, strong and compelling reasons exist for doing so."(10) This established the framework for later U.S. action.

Given the hostile environment confronting the United States in the UN throughout the 1970s, it should hardly be surprising that Congress debated various measures to withhold U.S. contributions. In 1978, the Legal Adviser of the Department of State confirmed in a memorandum that Article 17 "impose[s] a legal obligation on members to pay the amount assessed."(11) Yet it became increasingly difficult to make the case for fully unconditional payments on the basis of a legal obligation.

The UN's second financial crisis arose in the 1980s when the United States began withholding part of its dues.(12) The Congress and the Reagan administration were unhappy with specific UN policies and with the politicization of many specialized agencies and General Assembly procedures that gave the U.S. too little influence over budget decisions, UN administration and management, and the size of the U.S. assessment.

In 1985 Congress passed three pieces of legislation designed to cut U.S. contributions and secure changes. The Kassebaum Amendment proposed a reduction in the U.S. contribution to the UN budget from 25 percent to 20 percent unless the General Assembly approved a system of weighted voting for decision-making on financial matters. The Sundquist Amendment denied U.S. contributions to the salaries of Soviet bloc UN staff members for ideological reasons. Simultaneously, the Gramm-Rudman Act (The Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act) cut funds from federal government programs that went to various UN specialized programs as well as payments to the regular budget of the UN and 43 other international organizations. These three measures amounted to a fifty percent reduction in U.S. contributions to the United Nations in 1986. The Reagan administration failed to assert the legal obligation strongly, and the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, Alan Keyes, even praised the congressional actions.

The UN's second financial crisis was not solely the fault of the United States. Eighteen other member states, including four of the five permanent members of the Security Council, likewise, withheld payments for political reasons. In addition, many other states were late paying their bills for a variety of nonpolitical reasons. The combination of late payments and arrearages left the UN unable to fund programs and to reimburse states for peacekeeping expenses.

The General Assembly responded to the 1985 crisis by establishing the Group of Eighteen High-Level Intergovernmental Experts. Along with recommendations to cut UN staff and simplify procedures to save money, the Group of Eighteen formulated a compromise that gave the major donors increased power to review programs and establish priorities for the use of financial resources. The Committee for Program and Coordination (CPC) would review budgetary expenditures and send them to the Advisory Committee on Administration and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), then to the Fifth (Financial) Committee, and finally to the General Assembly itself. Consensus voting in the CPC gave the United States and other major donors a virtual veto over budgetary questions without technically altering the one-state/one-vote decision system. In other words, UN members were able to make critical procedural changes without amending the Charter. For the United States, this meant a greater ability to influence key UN decisions and met a key congressional condition for resuming payment.

Although these procedural changes ended the immediate financial crisis, they neither alleviated the structural problem of UN financing nor ended the U.S. practice of holding the UN hostage. They did, however, weaken the anti-UN coalition in Congress. Some legislators continued to have concerns beyond the budget, while others felt significant progress had been made. In 1987, a new legislative formula permitted the President to release forty percent of the U.S. annual assessment but held another forty percent hostage to UN progress in reform. The final twenty percent would be released only after congressional evaluation of the reforms. Contrary to expectations, however, Congress never appropriated funds to cover the full assessment and U.S. arrears mounted.(13)

The third financial crisis arose in 1995, in the aftermath of UN peace operations in a number of countries, including Iraq, Somalia, Cambodia, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. The newly-elected, Republican controlled Congress led an all-out assault on the United Nations. Although the United States had paid its assessment in 1992 and 1993, arrears from the 1980s had never been cleared. In the 1996 budget, Congress mandated (with President Clinton's acquiescence) that the United States not pay its full peacekeeping assessment (31 percent of total peacekeeping costs), and contributions to the regular UN budget dipped below the assessed 25 percent. These actions occurred despite the UN's efforts to meet U.S. demands for consensus-based budgeting and zero nominal budget growth. In 1997 and 1998, the United States lost its ACABQ seat because of its arrears. Only urgent late payments in 1998 and 1999 prevented the United States from losing its General Assembly vote under Article 19.(14)

Disputes over the amount owed complicated the problem of U.S. arrearages. Although the UN estimated U.S. arrears at around \$1.7 billion, the United States put the amount closer to \$1 billion. Regardless of the precise figure, the United States was clearly and deliberately in arrears to the UN, thanks to congressional actions that were intended to embarrass the Clinton Administration and to force reform within the UN. Simultaneously, the United States' pattern of negative voting continued to reflect its ambivalence toward multilateralism. These actions increasingly isolated the United States from both its allies and the majority of UN member states on a broad range of issues, many of which are discussed in separate chapters of this book.

Legal and Political Issues of Financing

Does the United States have a legal obligation to pay its UN assessments as the State Department's legal adviser and many legal scholars claim? Or, did the United Nations lose its right to be paid because of actions it has taken? Can political considerations justify the abrogation of legal obligations, as Ambassador Goldberg forewarned in 1965? During the 1980s and 1990s, the political justification prevailed, but it was buttressed by assorted legal arguments.

Three legal justifications have been given for the U.S. withholding under the 1985 Kassebaum Amendment. One suggested that a radical change of circumstances, or *rebus sic stantibus*, had occurred as the United Nations was transformed by the admission of large numbers of new members whose assessments were miniscule. In the words of two U.S. congressmen, the amendment was intended to "assure a more proportionate influence on the part of the major donors with respect to budgetary matters."⁽¹⁵⁾ This rationale has never been widely accepted. Should there be such a fundamental change in circumstances, members would have only two legal options: accept the new circumstances or withdraw from the Organization.⁽¹⁶⁾ Although the United States did withdraw from UNESCO and the ILO, withdrawal from the United Nations was never seriously considered, although conservative politicians did suggest it.

The second legal justification specifies that the minority in an organization enjoy certain rights. Equating the legal right of reservation to withholding, Zoller concludes that the latter prevents "the Organization from turning into 'a super-State.' Absent an impartial third body to give conclusive rulings on such possible deviations, the power to withhold payment is a necessary and proper power of each member state."⁽¹⁷⁾ Lacking a group of vocal adherents, this argument has not proven persuasive.

The legal justification heard most often centers on the relationship between international law and U.S. domestic law. John Bolton, a former Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, stated, "Treaties are simply 'political' obligations. . . treaty obligations can be unilaterally modified or terminated by congressional action, [and] America's constitutional requirements override 'international law.'"⁽¹⁸⁾ Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) reiterated this interpretation when he spoke before the UN Security Council on January 20, 2000. "Under our system," said Helms, "when international treaties are ratified they simply become domestic U.S. law. As such, they carry no greater or lesser weight than any other domestic U.S. law. Treaty obligations can be superseded by a simple act of Congress."⁽¹⁹⁾ This is a highly controversial interpretation. Although it is accepted in some conservative American legal circles, it is widely repudiated by foreign legal scholars. Thus, despite the absence of consensus on a legal justification for withholding, the practice itself has continued and is certainly not limited to the United States.

Given the political nature of these arguments, one might have expected U.S. withholding to have begun during the mid-1970s, when the United States faced the most hostile atmosphere in the United Nations. Instead, the United States expressed its disapproval during that period by turning away from the General Assembly, where the one-state/one-vote formula undermined its interests, focusing its energies on the Security Council and (in the case of economic issues) the IMF and World Bank, where weighted voting protected American influence. By the time of the

third financial crisis in the mid-1990s, however, both the Security Council's peacekeeping initiatives and the Secretary-General's management met U.S. disapproval. Congress thus used conditional withholding to micro-manage the United Nations.

A key question is why the Congress chose to focus so much attention on the United Nations and its procedures (and why, correspondingly, haven't successive presidents exercised stronger leadership on behalf of the UN). Luck suggests that because most UN activities, including peacekeeping, are not directly linked to U.S. national interests or to the interests of influential segments of the American public, they are vulnerable to rhetorical assaults, cavalier treatment, or even being ignored.⁽²⁰⁾ For this same reason, Presidents Bush and Clinton did not expend large amounts of scarce political capital to fight for meeting U.S. obligations to the UN. (Until the middle of Reagan's presidency the U.S. had met its funding obligations, so that this had not been an issue for previous presidents.) The congressional effort to micro-manage UN finance and administration may also be linked to the practice of assigning U.S. congressional delegates to the annual General Assembly sessions and, specifically, to the Fifth (budgetary) Committee. As a result, members of Congress are better informed "about what the UN spends than about what it does."⁽²¹⁾ Likewise, Congress, noted Senator Rod Grams (R-MN) in 1996, "has often been unhappy with the lack of emphasis that past and present administrations have placed on specific reform proposals."⁽²²⁾ Finally, of course, control over budgets and spending is the major tool that Congress has at its disposal for shaping U.S. domestic and foreign policies and the actions of the executive branch. All other congressional powers, including the power to investigate, pale by comparison with the power of the purse.

Giving or withholding funds is also the issue that resonates with the American public, which, of course, elects members to Congress. There has always been an underlying public discontent with the perception that the United States is "paying more than our share" and "not getting enough out of the organization," although polls have also shown public support for meeting current obligations. The General Accounting Office (GAO), which conducts periodic studies for Congress, has usually been critical of organizational inefficiencies in the United Nations, although in May 2000 the GAO found that reforms had strengthened UN management and other congressional objectives were difficult to achieve given the complexities of the UN's structure.⁽²³⁾ In the absence of a strong domestic constituency actively supporting the UN, reducing contributions has always been an "easy" and "safe" congressional choice to make. Senator Jesse Helms mirrored the views of many others in Congress when he reminded the UN Security Council in early 2000, "Under the U.S. Constitution, we in Congress are the sole guardians of the American taxpayers' money. It is our solemn duty to see that it is wisely invested."⁽²⁴⁾ In the absence of strong presidential leadership and with partisanship running strong as described below, Congress has determined U.S. policy toward the UN through its control of contributions.

The Helms-Biden Act: A Solution?

The UN's third financial crisis not only pitted the United States against the United Nations over mounting U.S. arrearages and escalating unilateral demands for UN reform, but also President Clinton, a supporter of fulfilling U.S. financial obligations, against Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) and the Republican majority in Congress. Yet, even Helms had become aware by

1996 that the tactic of unilateral, conditional withholding of contributions had been used too much and was not working. He told a Senate hearing, "Withholding contributions has not worked. We have tried that."⁽²⁵⁾ Hence, the challenge was to find a compromise solution linking UN reforms to substantial arrears payments. That came in the form of bipartisan legislation sponsored by the two senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: Jesse Helms and Joseph Biden (D-DE). Still, their effort was complicated by the ability of other legislators to attach unrelated amendments, a strategy used by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) in 1997 and 1998 to link an anti-abortion measure to the UN reform and funding bill. Smith's amendment prohibited the administration from financing any international organization that used funds to lobby foreign governments to ease policies on abortions. As a result, President Clinton vetoed the Helms-Biden Act in October 1998, making clear that abortion had a higher priority on his agenda than America's international commitments and debt to the United Nations.

Nonetheless, in his January 1998 State of the Union Address, President Clinton had, for the first, time, made payment of the UN arrears a legislative goal. The October 1998 veto, therefore, did not stop the efforts to find a compromise linking UN reform and payment of arrears. In August 1999, President Clinton instructed UN ambassador-designate Richard Holbrooke to "play a key role in working with the Congress to meet our obligations and to secure needed reforms in the United Nations."⁽²⁶⁾ His task became more compelling when a GAO report suggested that the United States could lose its vote in the General Assembly beginning January 1, 2000, unless it paid a portion of its dues by the end of the year. Holbrooke's challenge was to get his foreign colleagues at the UN to make concessions, pending the outcome of congressional negotiations designed to cover the dues and begin to pay the arrearages. Holbrooke also met frequently with individual members of Congress.

In November 1999, a compromise on the funding issue was reached in the form of the Helms-Biden UN Reform Act of 1999 (Title IX Public Law 106-113).⁽²⁷⁾ The compromise gave the president some flexibility to void the anti-abortion amendment's provisions for U.S. overseas family planning programs. President Clinton signed the legislation as the best-available deal to get payment of UN arrearages, despite criticism from pro-choice groups, the tough conditions the bill contained for release of funds, and lingering questions whether this would solve the longstanding problem of congressional withholding.

Under the Helms-Biden plan, U.S. payments to the United Nations will be released in three installments. Conditions or benchmarks have to be reached before each tranche of funds can be released. Before the first payment of \$100 million could be authorized, Congress had to receive certification from the executive branch that the United Nations and its related agencies had not taken any of seven types of actions. Three of the certifications related to American sovereignty: The UN and its agencies had taken no actions that would require the U.S. to violate the Constitution or any of its laws; the UN and its agencies had taken no actions that exercised sovereignty over the U.S.; and no UN agency had exerted authority or control over U.S. property rights. Four other conditions were designed to limit the UN's power. The organization could impose no tax on U.S. nationals; no UN agency had attached interest charges on U.S. arrears; no UN agency had attempted to acquire authority to borrow from external sources; and no steps had been taken to create or develop a standing army under Article 43 of the Charter.

Anticipating these Helms-Biden provisions, the State Department had been working on the necessary certifications that, fortunately, were relatively easy. Once they were complete, the first installment of \$100 million was released on December 16, 1999, ensuring that the United States retained its General Assembly vote after January 1, 2000.

The Helms-Biden conditions for the second year, because they affected the operations of the UN and the budgets of other member states, were much more difficult to meet. These focused on reforming the scales of assessments used by the UN for both regular and peacekeeping budgets. Hence, they required the concurrence of a majority of UN members—no easy task in an atmosphere poisoned by resentment at the United States' deadbeat status, unilateral withholding, and demands for reform before payment of arrearages. The requisite three conditions were: 1) No member's assessed share of the UN regular budget should exceed 22 percent, which would mean a 3 percent drop in the U.S. assessment; 2) the U.S. share of the peacekeeping budget should not exceed 25 percent, a 6 percent reduction; 3) the UN should establish a "contested arrearages account" for U.S. arrears not covered by the legislation and failure to pay contested amounts should not affect application of Article 19. In short, the Helms-Biden plan sought to ensure that the United States could continue to vote. These conditions were key to the Helms-Biden initiative since a primary congressional goal was to force members of the UN to establish a new scale of assessments in which the U.S. share would be reduced *before* arrears were cleared.

Although most states acknowledged the benefit of having the U.S. share drop, they wanted equity and they wanted the negotiations over the payment shares to occur *after* the U.S. arrears had been paid. The Western allies, including the European Union and Japan, made it clear that they saw an inequity in the new scale of assessments. Based on shares of world GNP, they noted, the United States should pay 27 percent, in contrast to the proposed 20 to 22 percent. By contrast, the European Union countries currently pay 36.6 percent, whereas their share of world GNP is about 29 percent and Japan pays 20.6 percent, when its share of world GNP is below 15 percent.⁽²⁸⁾ Japan's UN representative, Yukio Satoh, reported "brewing resentment over Japan's bill" when he met with Diet members. The politicians questioned why "we have to pay this much," especially since Japan was unable to obtain a seat on the Security Council. ⁽²⁹⁾ The resentment became stronger as the U.S. unilaterally sought to reduce its own payments with no guarantee that U.S. arrears would be cleared, given other Helms-Biden conditions. As China's ambassador Wang Yingfang diplomatically stated, "Certainly, we regret very much that a big power with great ability to contribute more is not quite constructive in this field."⁽³⁰⁾ Many UN members commented on how petty the U.S. actions looked in view of the buoyancy of the U.S. economy at that time.

In December 2000, after months of negotiations, UN members agreed to reduce the U.S. assessment to 22 percent and realign other members' dues, therefore meeting the major second year condition of Helms-Biden. The General Assembly also voted to reduce the U.S. share of peacekeeping expenses from 30 percent to 27 percent, 3 percent short of the 25 percent level mandated in Helms-Biden. The Assembly did not include a tougher and more confrontational provision supported by many European states that would have made the U.S. reduction conditional on payment of all arrears by 2003. It did, however, include language that left open the possibility of overturning the arrangement if something went wrong. To make up for the

reduction in U.S. contributions (and a one percent reduction of Japan's contribution), eighteen other countries, including Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, Brazil, Chile, the Czech Republic, Argentina, and Persian Gulf oil states agreed to increase their own contributions. (Russia and China also volunteered to increase their contributions, though marginally.) Key to acceptance of the changes was a one-time only grant of \$34 million by private citizen Ted Turner to the U.S. State Department to make up for the funding shortfall in the interim between approval of the new assessments and countries' next budgetary cycles.(31)

The compromise drew favorable comments in all quarters. Key members of Congress were very positive. Senator Jesse Helms praised Ambassador Holbrooke's accomplishment, saying, "I consider it a real leap forward," noting, nonetheless, that all the issues were not resolved.(32) Senator John Kerry (D-MA) noted that the measure would provide time "to change attitudes in Congress toward the U.N."(33) British Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock echoed the positive sentiments, calling the deal a "huge breakthrough." Holbrooke himself, termed it "a tremendous achievement for the United Nations," having devoted most of his sixteen months as chief U.S. representative to the tough diplomatic work of securing agreement when few thought he would succeed given the poisoned relationship between the U.S. and even its closest allies on the issue of linking arrears payment to a deal on a new assessment scale.(34)

Ambassador Holbrooke and his colleagues had negotiated endlessly with UN member delegations and the Secretariat, visited national capitals, and arranged the January 2000 visit of Jesse Helms to the Security Council as well as the return visit of UN ambassadors to Capitol Hill. Over 800 telegrams were sent on behalf of the U.S. position.(35) In a key move, Holbrooke had framed the issue in terms of changing an outdated allocation system to a flatter and more equitable scale of assessments, a view that others eventually accepted.

The achievement of the Helms-Biden act's second year conditions enabled the payment in December 2001 of another \$475 million (and a \$107 million credit against amounts owed by the UN to the United States for peacekeeping support). That left the still tougher third year conditions centering on budget and personnel concerns for the UN and specialized agencies. Ten conditions were outlined. They included a further drop in the U.S. assessment to 20 percent, and extended this condition to all specialized agencies—a particular problem since the latter have separate charters, memberships, and budgets. Another condition called for a guarantee that the United States and five largest contributors would have seats on the ACABQ. Further stipulations were for WHO, FAO, and ILO to appoint inspector generals and to achieve zero nominal growth in their budgets. New budget procedures in these agencies and the UN itself were also expected to ensure that any increases in spending would have to be approved by consensus. The U.S. General Accounting Office was to be provided with access to all UN financial data to review operations. Finally, Helms-Biden called for UN staff positions to be filled on the basis of merit and a Code of Conduct established to govern their behavior.

Under the terms of the Helms-Biden compromise, the president was given some ability to waive specific conditions, namely the contested arrears account and the requirement for lowering the U.S. assessment for the UN's regular budget to 20 percent. Other miscellaneous provisions included a required report on Israel's participation in the organization, a prohibition on payment of any arrears to the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) from which

the U.S. withdrew in 1997, data on the costs being borne by the U.S. for support of all Security Council resolutions, and monthly updates on all current and potential peacekeeping missions. Clearly, one aim of the legislation was to make it more difficult for the president to exercise discretionary power in managing the U.S.-UN relationship.

Although the Helms-Biden Act provided a means of resolving the crisis over U.S. participation in the UN, a number of issues remain unanswered. Is the arrears crisis actually resolved or will the issue arise again in the future? Was the Congressional strategy of unilateral withholding a strategy for pushing UN reform or was it largely for symbolic domestic purposes? If it was the former, will the steps it mandated strengthen or weaken the United Nations? If it was for the latter, what guarantees are there that the strategy of unilateral withholding will not be used again? Can the U.S. continue to exert power and influence within the UN having used such confrontational strategies and antagonized even its closest allies? Or, has the strategy of withholding contributions and demanding changes before payment of arrears permanently weakened its leverage? To answer at least some of these questions, we need to examine the reasons why financing has become a bellwether for the overall relationship between the United States and the UN.

Analyzing the Dynamics of the U.S.-UN Relationship

Previous studies of U.S. policy toward international organizations have explained the dynamics of the relationship in terms of the changing nature of issues, specific characteristics of international organizations, and domestic political factors.⁽³⁶⁾ Several more recent studies suggest the importance of specific characteristics of a country such as a preference for multilateralism or exceptionalism. Here, we focus particularly on the nature of the issues, domestic political factors, some of the unique characteristics of American political culture, and the current position of the United States as sole superpower.

Nature of The Issues. In analyzing how the nature of issues affects the relationship between the United States and the UN and, in particular, U.S. financial contributions, a distinct pattern is apparent. On the one hand are issues where there have been significant policy differences between the U.S. and other member states such that the U.S. found itself isolated and in opposition to large UN majorities, leading to perceptions of the UN as a hostile place and to efforts to pull back from multilateralism and to use U.S. financial contributions as a tool of influence. On the other are issues that have drawn U.S. support because the UN is the desirable place for dealing with them, for sharing burdens, and for promoting American interests and values. These types of issues reinforce support for paying assessed contributions and, most importantly, for making voluntary contributions.

As discussed earlier, the differences were striking during the 1970s with the debates over the proposed New International Economic Order, how to deal with apartheid in South Africa, and other North-South issues. The issues divided not only the North and South, but also divided the United States and its allies, many of whom were more accommodating of developing countries' interests. These differences persist with respect to issues relating to Israel and Middle East politics. The efforts to cut U.S. budgetary contributions in response to deep differences over certain issues and to withdraw from heavily politicized specialized agencies began in the

1970s, accelerated in the 1980s, and persisted in the 1990s. Why should the U.S. finance activities that it does not support? Although the issue differences have been somewhat less apparent in the 1990s since the General Assembly adopted consensus decision-making procedures for more than 80 percent of its resolutions (see Figure 1), they remain prominent in Middle East-related issues, which continue to be the primary source of U.S. voting against the majority.⁽³⁷⁾ Thus, financial contributions have been one instrument that the U.S. has used to express displeasure with political trends in the UN.

The countervailing pattern can best be seen in the issues that have drawn the United States to the UN repeatedly over the years and drawn strong congressional support for voluntary contributions—often well in excess of 25 percent of a program's budget. These include interdependence issues such as AIDS, refugees, children (UNICEF), famine, drugs, and development. Until the late 1990s, the United States voluntarily provided logistics support for all peacekeeping operations, moving troops and equipment of other countries to the locations where they were needed. Table 1 summarizes U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions for the last three years. The unmistakable conclusion is that the congressional tactic of unilateral withholding has applied almost exclusively to the general UN budget and peacekeeping. Voluntary contributions to programs and agencies dealing with issues that reflect shared interests increased in this period.

The biggest puzzle in examining the role played by the nature of issues is congressional resistance since 1993 to paying the full American share of UN peacekeeping costs. Arguably, peacekeeping operations, especially where other countries provide the manpower, represent burden-sharing at its best. Not only have members of Congress sought to hamstring the executive branch in providing American troops, however, they have also used the unilateral withholding tactic to cut U.S. contributions and to block the UN from creating a standby capacity for peacekeeping, policing, and administration in troubled areas such as Kosovo, East Timor, and Sierra Leone. We must search within American domestic politics for explanation of this behavior and, indeed, for further explanation of the U.S.-UN relationship and behavior on financing.

Domestic politics. The dynamics of U.S. domestic politics, particularly executive-legislative relations, presidential leadership, and public opinion have historically had a significant influence on the U.S.-UN relationship and especially on financing. The Constitutional separation of powers creates a dynamic tension between the President and Congress and permits multiple voices to speak for the United States at any given time. Whereas bipartisanship and consensus on foreign policy marked executive-legislative relations during the height of the Cold War, since the Vietnam and Watergate in the mid-1970s, Congress has been much more assertive on foreign policy issues generally and come to define the terms of the U.S. participation in the UN. Yet, as Edward Luck notes, Congress "is not organized, equipped, or legally competent to conduct multilateral diplomacy."⁽³⁸⁾

The changing dynamic of executive-legislative relations on foreign policy issues has been especially marked in the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War, partisan politics has been more divisive, as Stephen Walt comments, "because using foreign policy to bash one's rivals doesn't place the nation in immediate danger."⁽³⁹⁾ The differences between the two parties have become sharper and more ideological with Republicans generally more inclined to unilateralism

and Democrats leaning toward multilateralism. The Republican "Contract with America" was sharply critical of UN peacekeeping, among other things. Furthermore, deference to the president has declined, making it harder for presidents to lead. As James Lindsay has noted, "with no major threat to U.S. security on the horizon and with public interest [in foreign policy] waning, the costs of challenging the president plummeted."⁽⁴⁰⁾ This was further underscored after 1994 by the overt hostility of the Republican majorities in the Senate and House to President Clinton, their determination to thwart his leadership, and their use of unilateral withholding of U.S. dues both to embarrass the president and to impose reforms on--and limit obligations to--the UN.

Similarly, within the congressional context, absent a consensus on national security threats and in a climate of what Lindsay terms "apathetic internationalism," interest groups and individual members that care deeply about particular issues may be empowered because there is little impetus to block "the noisy few."⁽⁴¹⁾ This explains Rep. Chris Smith's success in attaching the anti-abortion amendment to the Helms-Biden bill and, hence, blocking settlement of the dues issue for two years. It explains the success of a variety of human rights, labor, and environmental groups on the issue of "fast-track" negotiating authority on trade and of the extreme right in largely blocking U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping missions. During the Clinton administration, the Republican-led Congress rarely missed an opportunity to micro-manage foreign policy, including the U.S. contributions to the UN.

Yet, it is important to note that voluntary contributions did not suffer the same fate. Whereas the annual assessments were perceived as a "rathole" and took on symbolic value in domestic politics, the "good works" of many UN agencies and programs, such as UNICEF and the UNHCR, left their funding untouched, if not increased.

The degree of Presidential leadership (or the absence thereof) has been another important factor explaining U.S. engagement with the United Nations. President Reagan's general opposition to international institutions effectively delegitimized multilateralism among many Republicans and resulted in an era of strained and sometimes hostile relationship between the U.S. and the UN. Likewise, President Clinton was slow to appoint a UN ambassador and an assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs at the beginning of his administration, sending a signal to Congress and to the United Nations that the latter was not high on his foreign policy agenda. After 1994, Clinton adopted the rhetoric of assertive multilateralism, but the rhetoric was not followed by sustained presidential effort to build support in Congress and the public on the new requirements of UN peacekeeping and for meeting U.S. financial obligations, let alone for serious reform of the UN. He effectively ceded the field to congressional critics and the Republican majority.

Clinton's foreign policy record in general was checkered. He showed episodic interest in periods of intense engagement followed by long periods of inattention and even neglect. He successfully used the powers of the presidency to secure congressional approval of NAFTA, the World Trade Organization, permanent normal trade relations with China, and the Chemical Weapons Convention. When Clinton's primary focus was on domestic policy or when he chose not to use political capital in support of a specific vision of the U.S. role in the world, then the administration suffered major defeats such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and getting

UN arrears paid. Too often, President Clinton's assertive multilateralism proved to be empty rhetoric, when he failed to use the powers of the presidency effectively.(42)

In confrontations with Congress, the Clinton administration strategy often framed issues as a simple dichotomy or an epic struggle between the forces of good and evil. For example, Clinton's National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger declared "the internationalist consensus that has prevailed in this country for more than 50 years increasingly is being challenged by a new isolationism heard and felt particularly in the Congress." (43) In the debate over UN contributions, the question seemed to be, "Are you a John Bircher or do you believe that we should pay our lawfully assessed dues?" (44) This strategy backfired because branding Republicans as isolationists antagonized congressional supporters and critics alike, making it even more difficult for the President to win support from Congress. The failure of the Clinton administration to use presidential leadership effectively on the arrears payments, even though the administration supported such payments, led to the standoff between Congress and the executive branch and eroded the UN- U.S. relationship.

Throughout these vicissitudes, the American public has remained strikingly supportive both of the United Nations and for meeting U.S. obligations to pay its arrears to the organization. American support for the UN has historically ranged between 60 and 75 percent. A June 1999 Pew Research Council poll found 70 percent had a favorable view of the UN. As Steven Kull notes in an earlier chapter of this volume, polling data suggest that although the public has some reservations about UN performance and administrative waste, a majority of Americans support full payment of dues, citing the country's obligation to do so.(45) The "apathetic internationalism" alluded to earlier, has contributed to politicians' neglect of foreign policy, the empowerment of "squeaky wheels" such as Rep. Smith, and the difficulties of exercising presidential leadership in an environment where there are few incentives for Congress to defer to the president on foreign policy.(46) Public opinion has apparently not affected the behavior of Congress on the UN issue, perhaps because members of Congress listen only to the skeptics who seem "much more passionate and ideological in their rejection of the UN than do the larger numbers of their countrymen who vaguely value the organization and its work." (47)

American political culture. Exceptionalism has a long history in American political culture. "For most Americans," notes Edward Luck, "the sense of exceptionalism has been so much a part of their outlook, values, and national character that it has received only occasional question or critical comment." (48) The United States is not unique in this regard. Other great powers, such as the Soviet Union, China, and France, have also been "less willing than others to compromise in multilateral fora for the sake of approval or to maintain consensus.... Each combined a distinct political culture with an allergy to certain issues on the UN agenda.... and each has disputed the amount of money it has been assessed by the UN." (49) Today, the cultural roots of American exceptionalism are complemented and reinforced by the exceptional nature of America's standing as the sole superpower in the post-Cold War world, and underlying that, the exceptional size and strength of its military capability and economy.

Sole Superpower Status. From the perspective of many other countries, and from the standpoint of many Americans, the exceptional power the U.S. currently enjoys explains much of its unilateralist tendencies. As Luck has noted, "The challenge for the United States is one of

“reconciling America’s exceptional power and the politics of multilateral bodies.”(50) The Wilsonian vision may have fostered a world of laws and institutions in America’s own image, but as sole superpower, the United States is far from comfortable behaving like just another state in that system. We aver, however, that the explanations for unilateralist behavior cannot be found only in Realist (or Neo-Realist) theory of international relations, but lie deeply embedded in American domestic politics and political culture. Yet, by the same token, interdependence issues and the democratic nature of its political culture draw the United States to the UN and to multilateralism. As John Ikenberry has noted, “The U.S. is not a 19th-century imperial power and because America’s power is derived in part from its values, it must work to strengthen the institutions of world order for the betterment of others rather than hoarding power.”(51) Therein lies the dilemma.

Having probed these alternative sources of explanation for the U.S.-UN relationship and how financing became a bellwether issue, we turn now to examine some of the consequences of U.S. failure to meet its financial obligations to the UN.

Consequences of U.S. Manipulation of Finances

There are four distinct consequences of using the financial carrot and stick approach with the UN. First, the UN has long-standing financial problems because it has no independent source of financing and depends solely on its members for assessed and voluntary contributions. Chronic budget crisis is the norm, not the exception. The crisis of the 1990s has not only magnified the perennial struggle for resources but also undermined the UN’s ability to undertake new operations and support existing ones, particularly in the peacekeeping area. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations is estimated to be short at least 100 staffers, leaving it unprepared and unable to meet the current obligations – much less to expand by approximately 250 staff, as proposed in the UN’s own Brahimi Report in summer 2000 for improving UN peacekeeping operations.(52) The financial crisis has affected multiple areas of UN activity. Cutbacks in humanitarian and human rights programs have reduced the UN’s ability to provide for the safety of refugees and internally displaced persons. Similarly, allegations of genocide and human rights violations are not pursued. The specialized agencies, such as the WHO and ILO, are also affected and will be particularly affected when the third year conditions of Helms-Biden impose zero nominal growth budgets. Have members of Congress calculated the costs of a weakened UN system to the U.S. ability to share the burdens of addressing the wide range of global interdependence issues that concern it? As William Luers notes, “the United States has a vital interest in strengthening the U.N. system. Acting alone is not a sustainable option.”(53)

Second, the use of arrears as a financial instrument has had a detrimental effect on U.S. relations with allies who have expressed exasperation with American arrogance. They have heard the U.S. complaints before in NATO or in the U.S.-Japanese alliance, where neither side believes that the other is bearing its fair share of the burden. Within the UN, the division between the United States and its NATO allies has never been greater and the gap in their voting patterns has steadily widened. Whether this “New York effect” has permanently damaged key relationships remains to be seen, but it is one factor contributing to shifts underway in Europe as the European Union develops its security and defense policy, enhancing its capability as an independent actor and altering its relationship with the United States.(54)

Third, by using its power of the purse too much and too often, the United States has undercut its leadership in the United Nations itself. In the view of British UN Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the arrearage problem has hindered the UN reform effort and the United States must be prepared to compromise with other states. Dutch Ambassador van Walsum stated that member states could not attach conditions to paying their assessments. Likewise, Canadian UN Ambassador Robert Fowler stated that the U.S. unilateral approach to crucial UN funding and reform would not lead to useful results.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Responding to Senator Helms on the occasion of his January 2000 visit to the Security Council, Ambassador Greenstock said, "The United Nations is not a separate organ, like a fire service. It is the member states, and the United States owns 25 percent of the power and the resources of the United Nations. What it does well, the U.S. get credit for. What it does badly, the U.S. must bear some responsibility for."⁽⁵⁶⁾ If U.S. behavior persists, foreign delegations may come to regard U.S. commitments as no longer credible. Some countries have already begun to imitate the U.S. "bad habit of delaying payments" until the end of the year, notes Luers.⁽⁵⁷⁾

American decision-makers are also aware that the ability of the United States to exercise leadership may be jeopardized. Prominent American foreign policy experts are worried about the effects that American withholding has had. Princeton Lyman, former assistant secretary of state for international organization reported in comments appended to the May 2000 GAO report on *United Nations Financial Issues and U.S. Arrears*, "At every possible opportunity, other member states use the arrears to skewer U.S. negotiating positions, whether the topic is related to arrears or not. The arrears situation has seriously eroded our influence on reform."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Secretary of State Madeleine Albright herself acknowledged if the U.S. reneges on its commitment to UN peacekeeping, "Our ability to lead at the UN will be damaged seriously. Our influence would surely diminish over decisions ranging from maintaining sanctions against rogue states to UN reform to ensuring greater balance within the General Assembly on resolutions affecting the Middle East." She added, "Our ability to argue that other nations should meet their obligations to the UN and to international law would be undermined."⁽⁵⁹⁾ Congressman Chris Shays (R-CT), a co-sponsor of the UN Arrears Payment Act, H.R. 1355, captured the concern of many members who recognize the risks to American leadership of the failure to pay up, saying, "Each day that we do not pay our debts to the U.N. we lose our ability to shape world events. This loss of leadership is a national disgrace."⁽⁶⁰⁾

Fourth, the financing issue is not only a bellwether for the U.S.-UN relationship, but also symptomatic of a declining willingness to pay for non-military costs of American engagement in international affairs more generally. For over four decades, the portion of the U.S. budget designated to non-military international affairs has been steadily declining. Richard Gardner a former U.S. ambassador and former deputy assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, has warned against the "'one percent' solution--the fallacy that a successful U.S. foreign policy can be carried out with barely one percent of the federal budget." Gardner notes that an "effective foreign policy will simply be impossible without more money."⁽⁶¹⁾ The Executive Branch needs the capacity to deal with multiple global issues and to make trade offs not only at the UN but in other foreign policy arenas as well. Current budget allocations to non-military foreign affairs are clearly inadequate, and UN contributions are but one part of this broader problem.

Is the Past a Prologue for the Future?

The end of the Cold War, and the widespread acceptance of market economics, democratic governance, and human rights, appeared to return the United Nations to the center of world politics and to mark the achievement of Woodrow Wilson's vision of open diplomacy, collective security, reduced trade barriers, self-determination, and a general association of nations. As Robert Pastor notes in his essay on the United States in the twentieth century, "The United States was farsighted in internationalizing these tasks and in sharing the burden of financing and responsibility, although another part of the U.S. mind distrusted its international institutional offspring."⁽⁶²⁾ Thus, ironically, the United States seems increasingly uncomfortable with the institution and rules its earlier vision helped to create. Whereas American exceptionalism and idealism once inspired the United States to engage in constructive internationalism and to foster the development of multilateral institutions and international law, exceptionalism and attachment to sovereignty today drive U.S. opposition to multilateral initiatives to promote human rights, reduce economic inequalities, foster the further growth of global civil society, and arrest environmental degradation.

In the 21st century, will the United States find the UN a useful venue in which to pursue American interests? Will it therefore choose to honor its financial commitments? Will it continue to press for legitimate reform without undermining the institution through unilateral withholding? Will it renew its commitment to the liberal internationalist vision of a world marked by the development of international law and institutions, expanded human rights, multilateralism, and democracy? Or will U.S. behavior more closely resemble that of a status quo power, protecting its prerogatives and opposing system change? In other words, which past pattern will be the prologue to the future?

The U.S. responses to several recent international trends have been ambiguous. The United States may have fostered the growth of many international institutions including the UN, but there is growing ambivalence, if not outright fear, of emerging pieces of global governance, even if the U.S. was an initial supporter. The U.S. has supported some UN reforms, but stifled others, increased its voluntary contributions to UN agencies and programs in several key areas, but sought reductions in its budget and peacekeeping assessments. It has reacted to some trends by reaffirming American exceptionalism and sovereignty. An American soldier serving in a UN peacekeeping operation rejects wearing the UN insignia to reaffirm his service to the United States and not to the UN. The United States flouted legal obligations to pay its UN dues because of vague charges of the UN's lack of accountability. It has advocated greater respect for human rights, used the UN's human rights machinery to criticize prominent violators, and threatened sanctions, but refused to accept the norms for itself, rejected the jurisdiction of an International Criminal Court for American peacekeepers and any suggestion that rights violations in the United States are legitimate subjects of international investigation. To some, these assertions of sovereignty are grounded in the U.S. Constitution, while to others, they are grounded in the arrogance of a sole superpower.⁽⁶³⁾

Will UN reforms help? Incremental reforms have occurred periodically throughout the UN's history. The types of reforms pushed by the United States have hardly been radical; indeed, they reflect the conservative interests of a status quo power for the most part. Congressional micro-management of reform by withholding has complicated the picture,

repeatedly moved the “goalposts” just as the UN satisfied earlier demands, and made states less willing to push for reforms under the threat of financial blackmail. The challenge is identifying reforms that both strengthen the UN and secure U.S. support. Secretary-General Annan has instituted widespread qualitative and quantitative reforms and won positive reviews from many quarters including the normally critical General Accounting Office,⁽⁶⁴⁾ but by his own admission, there need to be more. The problem is not unlike that faced in the process of creating the UN in the first place: how to design a world body that will both meet the interests and needs of many countries and ensure continuing American participation.

Innovative steps are taking place far beyond any issues of UN Charter revision. Ted Turner's billion-dollar donation to the UN could be a harbinger for lessening the UN's dependence on member state contributions. A private financing alternative, along with Secretary-General Annan's Corporate Partnership initiatives may alleviate some of the financial strains. Greater reliance on NGOs both within the UN and beyond to deliver humanitarian relief, development assistance, and other functions may provide decentralized alternatives to the UN as a centerpiece of global governance. President Clinton in his address to the UN General Assembly on September 22, 1997 hailed these initiatives. "Innovative partnerships with the private sector [NGOs], and the international financial institutions can leverage its effectiveness many times over."⁽⁶⁵⁾ These innovations are not apt to "resolve" the UN's financial crisis, however. Private contributions cannot fund UN programs since expenses must, according to the Charter, be borne by member states. Perhaps, even more importantly, these types of innovations augur an even greater loss of control by the very same member states that seek enhanced control. They would certainly not ensure U.S. commitment to the UN.

The approach the United States has used to secure administrative and managerial reforms as well as changes in its assessments, namely withholding dues and linking payment of its arrears to these changes, threatens to diminish its leverage and capacity to lead in the future. This approach has reeked of the arrogance of the world's sole superpower. As former Clinton National Security Adviser Samuel Berger warned, “Our authority is built on qualities very different from our power: on the attractiveness of our values, on the force of our example, on the credibility of our commitments, and on our willingness to listen to and stand by others. There may be no real threat to our power today. But if we use power in a way that antagonizes our friends and dishonors our commitments, we will lose our authority—and our power will mean very little.”⁽⁶⁶⁾

What the United States needs is a new international vision to guide the use of its unique position in the international system. Such a vision almost sixty years ago led to the establishment of the UN and a set of other liberal international institutions. If the United States is going to play a leadership role in supporting and strengthening the UN as a central institution for dealing with the challenges of a globalizing and interdependent world, the new Bush administration will need to articulate that vision and forge domestic consensus behind it. The U.S.-UN relationship was a critical foundation for the liberal world the United States sought to create in the twentieth century. Renewing that relationship and restoring the credibility of American commitments to UN financing will be crucial for American leadership and interests in the twenty-first century.