**America, we pay way too much for the United Nations**

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Each year the United States gives approximately $8 billion in mandatory payments and voluntary contributions to the United Nations and its affiliated organizations. The biggest portion of this money – about $3 billion this year – goes to the U.N.’s regular and peacekeeping budgets.

If that seems like a lot, it is—far more than anyone else pays And it’s also, in some cases, bad value for money.

The U.N. system for calculating member nations’ “fair share” payment toward its regular and peacekeeping budgets has increasingly shifted the burden away from the vast majority of the 193 members and onto a relative handful of high-income nations, especially the U.S. Indeed some nations pay next to nothing.

Over the last six decades, the share of the U.N. expenses borne by poor or small member states has steadily ratcheted downward to near- microscopic levels. From 1974 to 1998, the minimum mandatory payment for the regular budget for example, fell from 0.04 percent to 0.001 percent. For the peacekeeping budget, the minimum is 0.0001 percent.

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In addition, over three quarters of the total U.N. membership get additional discounts, with the cost also shifted to wealthier countries.

The end result is a hugely skewed bill for U.N. expenses.

In 2015, 35 countries will be charged the minimum regular budget assessment of 0.001 percent which works out to approximately$28,269 each. Twenty countries will be charged the minimum peacekeeping assessment of 0.0001 percent or approximately $8,470 apiece.

By contrast, the U.S. is assessed 22 percent of the regular budget (approximately $622 million) and over 28 percent of the peacekeeping budget (approximately $2.402 billion).

Put another way, the U.S. will be assessed more than 176 other member states *combined* for the regular budget and more than 185 countries c*ombined* for the peacekeeping budget. Who says America isn’t exceptional!

This is more than a complaint about dollars. It’s also about the value received for those outsized contributions. Consider:

· An independent academic study assessing best and worst practices among aid agencies [ranked U.N. organizations among the worst](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2058330).

· Numerous reports, audits, and investigations have revealed [mismanagement, fraud and corruption](http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/2015/key-issues-of-us-concern-at-the-united-nations) in procurement for U.N. peacekeeping.

· Studies and reports have identified [U.N. peacekeepers as the source of the cholera](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Clinics/Haiti_TDC_Final_Report.pdf) outbreak that ravaged Haiti starting in 2010, leaving more than 8,000 dead and more than 600,000 seriously sickened.

· A [2014 study](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/787) of eight of the nine U.N. peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect civilians found that peacekeepers “did not report responding to 406 (80 per cent) of [the 570] incidents where civilians were attacked.”

· U.N. personnel have been accused of sexual exploitation and abuse in Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Kosovo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. Recent news stories from the [Central African Republic](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/06/04/un-peacekeeping-mission-orders-inquiry-into-child-sex-abuse-claim-in-central/) and [Haiti](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/sexual-exploitation-by-un-peacekeepers-remains-significantly-under-reported?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=%2AMorning%20Brief&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign) indicate the problem is still far too common and the U.N. is more interested in concealing the issue than in confronting it

· Atop all that, U.N. employees enjoy [extremely generous benefits](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/07/us-should-rein-in-lavish-un-salaries) and salaries—over [32 percent higher than U.S. civil servants](http://icsc.un.org/resources/pdfs/ar/AR2014.pdf?d=42520152:14:04PM) of equivalent rank.

Moreover, the U.N. and its employees enjoy broad protections and immunities and cannot be sued in national courts, arrested, or prosecuted for actions related to their official duties unless those immunities are waived. This places an extremely heavy responsibility on the U.N. to self-police, correct, and punish wrongdoing by the organization and its employees.

Unfortunately, oversight and accountability at the U.N. have historically been weak. And on the rare occasion when internal watchdogs bite, the organization moves to defang them.

Take the case of the Procurement Task Force (PTF) , a special U.N. unit that went to work in 2006  to root out corruption.   It uncovered fraud, waste, and mismanagement involving contracts valued at more than $630 million. It led to misconduct findings and convictions of U.N. officials.

Unfortunately the PTF was eliminated in 2008—at the behest of countries angry about PTF actions against their nationals holding U.N. staff positions. The U.N. has not completed any major corruption cases since the PTF was eliminated.

Poor oversight is made worse by U.N. hostility toward its own whistleblowers. Only a few weeks ago, nine staffers from various U.N. organizations sent a [letter](http://whistleblower.org/sites/default/files/%10Letter%20to%20UN-Secretary-General.pdf) to the Secretary-General asserting that the U.N. affords “little to no measure of real or meaningful protection for whistleblowers.”

The U.N. badly needs reform, but the U.S., despite the mammoth checks it writes, can’t reform the U.N. alone. In the one-nation, one-vote world of the U.N., it needs support from other nations. Unfortunately, many of them remain *blasé* about U.N. budget increases, corruption, and inefficiencies because the financial impact on them is miniscule.

To change the institution, the first thing that needs to change is the thumb-on-the-scales system that makes the U.S. the biggest bill-payer, but just one of 193 voting members when it comes to demanding honesty, efficiency and effectiveness in return for its over-generous payments.

Congress and the Obama administration have both said they want the United Nations to be more transparent and accountable and to use its resources more effectively. To make that happen, major donors must have a greater say in budgetary decisions, and smaller donors must assume financial responsibilities that lead them to undertake budgetary decisions and conduct serious oversight.

Every three years the U.N. General Assembly approves adjustment to its scale of assessments: 2015 is one of those years. The U.S. should not let this opportunity slip away to get more for its money—and make other nations actually try to make the U.N. live up to the image that the organization likes to show the world.