Congress Must Not Drop the Ball on Reporting US Contributions to the UN

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In December 2016, Congress passed the first [State Department authorization bill](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1635/text) in 14 years.

That measure, which became P.L. 114-323, included a requirement that the Office of Management and Budget report annually to Congress on “all assessed and voluntary contributions … of the United States government to the United Nations and its affiliated agencies and related bodies during the previous fiscal year.”

The requirement was included because, while the U.S. has historically been—and remains—the largest funder of the United Nations system, the U.S. only [periodically compiled a comprehensive report](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2014/pdf/IB4154.pdf) on those contributions.

In 2006, Congress for the first time required the OMB to submit a comprehensive report on total U.S. contributions to the U.N. system for fiscal years 2001 through 2005. That 2006 report revealed that actual U.S. contributions to the U.N. were far more than previously listed by the State Department in other reports to Congress.

Between 2005 and 2011, Congress required reports on U.S. contributions to the U.N. system, but in some years failed to specify that OMB produce the report. In each instance where the State Department compiled the report, U.S. contributions to the U.N. [implausibly](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2014/pdf/IB4154.pdf) fell below the amount reported for previous years by OMB.

This happens because, while most U.S. contributions to the U.N. system come from the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development, millions of dollars also flow from other parts of the federal government, and the State Department lacks the authority to require other agencies to provide full data in a timely manner.

Thus, State Department reports are less comprehensive than reports by OMB, which has more authority to compel agencies to provide information.

Going forward, Congress has mandated that the annual report be produced by OMB, which should greatly improve transparency and accuracy. Unfortunately, information from previous years will remain obscure unless Congress or OMB take steps to rectify the matter.

There are two main problems that must be addressed.

First, the reporting requirement in P.L. 114-323 only required OMB to provide information for the previous three fiscal years back to fiscal year 2014. But the previous reporting requirement lapsed in 2011.

Thus, a comprehensive accounting of U.S. contributions to the U.N. system for fiscal years 2011 through 2013 does not exist.

Second, while OMB provided a [report for fiscal year 2014](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/IAD/MASTER%20Sec%20312%20OMB%20Report_final.pdf), it did not do so for fiscal years 2015 or 2016. Instead, OMB referred Congress to two reports compiled by the State Department for [fiscal year 2015](https://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/2015/2015/267285.htm) or [fiscal year 2016](https://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/2016/2016/267320.htm). That’s a problem because:

(a) Congress asked OMB to compile the reports, not the State Department.

(b) Congress did so because State Department reports, such as State’s annual report to Congress on U.S. contributions to international organizations, present an incomplete picture. An example of this is the failure of the fiscal year 2016 State Department report to [list the $500 million that the Obama administration provided to the Green Climate Fund](https://www.rpc.senate.gov/policy-papers/state-depts-500-million-transfer-to-the-un).

To address these problems, unless OMB chooses to do so voluntarily, Congress should require OMB to submit reports for fiscal years 2011 through 2013, and review and update the fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2016 State Department reports to ensure they are comprehensive.