[Trump Administration Eyes $1 Billion in Cuts to U.N. Peacekeeping](http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/23/trump-administration-eyes-1-billion-in-cuts-to-u-n-peacekeeping/)

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The White House is seeking to cut $1 billion in funding for U.N. peacekeeping operations and to eliminate hundreds of millions of dollars for other U.N. programs that care for needy children and seek to lift the world’s poorest out of a life of grinding poverty, according to two diplomatic sources briefed on the plan.

The proposal is certain to face strong pushback from Democratic and Republican congressional leaders, who warned that President Donald Trump’s budget will never be passed. But it reflected the White House’s clear desire to jettison America’s traditional role as the champion of the downtrodden and embrace that of a military powerhouse to be feared.

The White House budget office informed State Department officials this week that the administration plans to eliminate all U.S. funding to the $326 million International Organizations and Programs account, which provides more than $130 million to UNICEF — a sizable chunk of the more than $500 million the United States contributed to the U.N. agency in 2016 — and around $70 million to the U.N. Development Programme.

They were also told to brace for a 40 percent cut to the State Department’s U.N. peacekeeping budget. The United States contributed more than $2 billion to the U.N.’s $8 billion-plus peacekeeping budget last year.

In New York, Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, is planning to host an April 6 meeting of the U.N. Security Council to discuss an ongoing U.S. review of the U.N.’s 16 peacekeeping missions.

Haley, who will serve as the council’s president for the month of April, will make the point that some of the U.N. missions may have outlived their usefulness and may need to be shuttered, reconfigured or shrunk, according to a confidential U.S. concept paper.

The paper, which was reviewed by Foreign Policy, urged Security Council members to “consider whether current peacekeeping operations continue to be the best-suited mechanisms for meeting the need of those on the ground and achieving the council’s political objectives, or if changes are needed. That is, are current missions ‘still fit for purpose’?”

The proposed U.N. cuts, which were drafted by the White House Office of Budget and Management, show that the Trump administration is seeking far deeper cuts to the U.N. in the international affairs budget than to the State Department or USAID. Last week, the White House released a preliminary budget projection — known as the skinny budget — that called for cuts of 28 percent to international organizations in the 2018 budget.

But big chunks of that outlay — including $3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel — are to be spared, and the White House has informed State Department officials that funding to NATO will also be left off the chopping block. That means the U.N. and other international organizations will have to absorb a far higher share of cuts. And programs that combat climate change or provide reproductive health services are likely to be cut altogether.

The State Department and the White House declined to comment on the specific targets. A State Department official said simply that the 2018 “budget request will reduce funding requested for the U.N. and affiliated agencies. ‎Beyond this, more details won’t be available until the president’s full FY 2018 Budget is rolled out later in the spring.”

A White House official added that “the president’s America First blueprint seeks to place more focus here at home and less abroad. That having been said, internal deliberations surrounding the full fiscal year 2018 budget are ongoing and final details will be announced in the mid-May release.”

U.S. government agencies contributed nearly $10.5 billion last year to a vast number of U.N. programs that vaccinate children, help keep the peace in conflict zones, care for refugees, feed the poor, and monitor the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Since the United States helped create the United Nations in the waning days of World War II, the body has been seen as a way to promote stability around the world and advance U.S. interests, including economic development, conflict prevention, and nonproliferation.

State Department officials had been informed by the White House budget office earlier this month that cuts to U.N. programs could run higher than 50 percent.

The White House wants to redirect a large portion of that money to increase the U.S. defense budget by $54 billion to $639 billion for national defense.

The president’s preliminary [budget](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/2018_blueprint.pdf) — titled “America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again” — would, in contrast, preserve funding to combat some of the world’s most lethal diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and it would honor a prior $1 billion pledge to Gavi, an alliance committed to vaccinating hundreds of millions of children.

But it threatened “to reduce or end” funding for international organizations, including the United Nations, which purportedly don’t serve U.S. foreign-policy interests. The goal is to create “the expectation that these organizations rein in costs and that the funding burden be shared more fairly among members.”

As an initial step, the United States would insist on reducing its current share of the U.N.’s regular budget below its current mandated rate of 22 percent, and slash its share of the U.N. peacekeeping budget from just over 28 percent to 25 percent. In order to hit those targets, the United States would have to convince other powers to make up the difference. Otherwise, America would quickly fall into arrears, risking the possibility of losing its vote in the U.N. General Assembly.

U.S. economic and development assistance would be channeled primarily to countries that are of “greatest strategic importance to the United States.”

Asked by a reporter whether the White House was concerned that U.N. cuts might harm the world’s most vulnerable, including more than 20 million facing famine in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen, Trump’s budget chief, Mick Mulvaney, [said](https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4661480/mick-mulvaney-foreign-aid-cuts): “We’re absolutely reducing funding to the U.N. and to the various foreign aid programs, including those run by the U.N. and other agencies.”

“That should come as a surprise to no one who watched the campaign,” he added. “The president said specifically hundreds of times.… ‘I’m going to spend less money on people oversees and more money on people back home,’ and that’s exactly what we’re doing with this budget.”

It is by no means sure that these cuts will be implemented. Key congressional leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the chair of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees funding to the State Department, called it “dead on arrival.” Aid advocates joined the chorus.

“These cuts are so disproportionate and out of the realm of reality that Congress needs to step in and take a more nuanced view,” Peter Yeo, the president of the Better World Campaign, a U.N. advocacy group, told FP.

Yeo said he is confident that Republicans and Democrats would push back against the cuts in congress.

“The people that make the decisions in the House and Senate, they know the U.N. accounts well and are very supportive,” he said. “It’s not a coincidence that they have nearly a decade of full funding at the U.N. The members who are in charge of appropriations have taken time to get smart on the issue.”

But some U.N. diplomats are less sure, noting that many congressional leaders have expressed the greatest alarm around cuts to the State Department, not those to the United Nations.

Legislation introduced in the House would withdraw U.S. funding for the United Nations, and Graham threatened to cut all U.S. funding to the U.N. in December, after the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution denouncing Israeli settlements.