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G.O.P. Renews Call to Tie U.N. Funding to U.S. Goals

by Neil McFarquhar, 25 January 2011

UNITED NATIONS — Republican members of Congress on Tuesday used their newly won control of the House to advocate that the United States hinge its hefty support for the United Nations budget to more tangible efforts by the organization to root out corruption and advance American foreign policy goals.

The House foreign affairs committee held an **initial briefing** to debate whether the administration should withhold the money for certain branches of the world body that members said worked against American interests. They focused much of their attention on the Geneva-based **Human Rights Council**, which repeatedly condemns Israeli rule over the **Palestinians** while generally ignoring abuses committed by member states like Iran, Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia.

The new committee chairwoman, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican of Florida, who did not attend the session for family reasons, criticized the Obama administration stance that the United States can be most effective in eliminating waste and pressing for reforms at the United Nations if it is participating fully in the organization.

“Ambassador **Susan Rice** says that the U.S. approach to the U.N. is: ‘We pay our bills. We push for real reform.’” Ms. Ros-Lehtinen said in the statement, which was read for her. “Instead, we should be conditioning our contributions on ‘reform first, pay later.’”

As with other actions by the Republican-controlled House, how much change it can put into effect is unclear given that Democrats control the Senate and the White House. Senator **John Kerry** of Massachusetts, chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, is a strong United Nations supporter.

Most questions directed at the six witnesses were divided along party lines. Republicans suggested that more financial oversight was essential for the United Nations to run smoothly. Democrats, while endorsing change, cautioned that the United States should not slash the budget of an organization that generally abets American foreign policy interests — from passing Security Council sanctions against Iran to distributing humanitarian aid in Haiti.

The expert witnesses were also divided, although even those pushing for greater Congressional financial oversight noted that the United Nations budget process made it difficult to isolate financing for particular branches.

Annual assessments from member states are lumped into a large pot — with the United States by far the largest contributor because of the size of its economy. It pays about one-fifth of the general budget and more than a quarter of the separate **peacekeeping** budget.

In 2009, the last year for which complete figures are available, the United States paid \$6.35 billion, roughly half in assessed contributions and the rest in voluntary payments for humanitarian and other needs, according to State Department figures.

The administration of Secretary General **Ban Ki-moon** has been accused of being weak on ferreting out corruption. After fierce opposition from member states, including Russia and Singapore, an independent investigations office that unearthed serious procurement corruption was disbanded, and promises to carry out the work internally were never put into effect.

The Obama administration has also been faulted — a permanent American ambassador at the United States Mission to oversee reform issues was not nominated until November and has not yet been confirmed. Withholding American budget support for the United Nations is a Republican perennial — [President Obama](#) reversed the Bush policy of not paying hundreds of millions of dollars in American arrears.

Mr. Ban will travel to Washington soon to meet with Republican lawmakers, although no date has been set, his spokesman said.