

# The Executive Memorandum

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## STAY OUT OF UNESCO

The Clinton Administration is weighing a U.S. return to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott wrote last December that a return to UNESCO, from which the U.S. withdrew in 1984, "remains high on our agenda." Rejoining UNESCO, however, would be a serious mistake. UNESCO is poorly managed, suffers from a vague mandate, and duplicates the efforts of other U.N. agencies and private organizations. Moreover, there is no need for the U.S. to rejoin because it already participates in the best UNESCO programs.

Established in 1946 and headquartered in Paris, UNESCO today is the third-largest specialized agency in the U.N. system. It has 182 member nations and an annual budget of some \$450 million. UNESCO attempts to foster international intellectual cooperation in a wide range of fields, including communications, education, and oceanography. These activities include collecting statistics on school enrollments and education spending in member states. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) promotes scientific research on the world's oceans. UNESCO also undertakes development programs in several fields, providing education-related fellowships and grants, for example. Its World Heritage Commission (WHC) aims to protect historic sites and natural landmarks by providing financial aid for restoration, technical advice, and training.

**Reagan Withdraws.** The Reagan Administration withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 largely because the agency had become highly politicized. When the U.S. left, many UNESCO programs and debates focused on disarmament, "collective rights," and other themes which Washington believed were departures from UNESCO's original mandate. Moreover, these activities, driven by East Bloc and Third World countries, were hostile to free markets and a free press. UNESCO became a hotbed of agitation for the so-called New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO), which would have sanctioned government licensing of reporters.

The Reagan Administration also criticized UNESCO for its top-heavy, over-centralized bureaucracy. The lavish lifestyle which UNESCO afforded Director General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, including his opulent penthouse above UNESCO headquarters, also aggravated U.S. officials. Moreover, during these years UNESCO had the most unrestrained budgetary expansion in the U.N. system.

**A Return to UNESCO?** Today's UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor Zaragoza has introduced some management reforms. As a result, he has won over the U.S. State Department to the view that the U.S. should rejoin UNESCO. The State Department believes that American concerns expressed ten years ago and reaffirmed by the Bush Administration have been addressed adequately. Clinton Administration officials have suggested that only budgetary concerns are keeping the U.S. from rejoining; full membership would cost Washington \$65 million a year.

Rejoining UNESCO, however, would be unwise for several reasons.

**REASON #1: UNESCO has serious management shortcomings.** A 1993 General Accounting Office (GAO) report notes that UNESCO has made little progress in remedying its overly centralized bureaucracy. UNESCO has too many of its personnel and activities based in its headquarters and not in the field. Employees, the GAO reports, are hesitant to leave behind their Parisian lifestyles. The resulting centralization complicates and reduces the effectiveness of UNESCO's activities. It is difficult, for example, to help a country develop its communications facilities when programs concerning this issue are centered in Paris. Moreover,

the GAO reported a planned 66 percent budget increase for 1994-1995 in the Participation Program, a reserve fund for special programs and grants which UNESCO insiders have described as a "slush fund" for the Director General.

**REASON #2: Rejoining UNESCO would send the wrong signal about U.N. management reform.** That UNESCO management is flawed should come as no surprise. The U.N. itself is poorly managed. Former Under-Secretary General for Administration and Management Dick Thornburgh, in a scathing 1993 report, wrote: "The United Nations presently is almost totally lacking in effective means to deal with fraud, waste and abuse by staff members." Current U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Madeleine Albright acknowledged last year that Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's reform efforts have been disappointing. While Boutros-Ghali has no direct control over UNESCO, the U.S. would be sending the wrong signal concerning how serious it is about U.N. reform if it were to rejoin UNESCO now.

**REASON #3: UNESCO's mission lacks focus.** UNESCO was chartered "for the purpose of advancing, through the educational, scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and the common welfare of mankind." This mandate is too broad and only encourages confusion about the agency's mission. The State Department in 1990 reported that confusion about UNESCO's mission has resulted in "a work program of astounding breadth, with resources spread so thinly that it has often been difficult to discern any measurable impact." This assessment remains valid today. The most efficient and valuable organizations within the U.N. system are those that pursue clearly defined tasks: technical organizations like the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunications Union.

**REASON #4: UNESCO activities are redundant.** The activities of UNESCO are duplicated by other U.N. organizations. The World Health Organization, for example, promotes awareness about AIDS, as does UNESCO. In fact, Boutros-Ghali has recognized that this problem exists among U.N. economic and social development programs. He is quoted in Thornburgh's 1993 report as complaining that "Duplication is widespread; co-ordination is often nominal; bureaucratic battles aimed at monopolizing a particular subject are rife; and organizational objectives are sometimes in conflict." Rejoining UNESCO would be a step away from the consolidation the U.N. system desperately needs. Moreover, UNESCO's educational programs also are duplicated by a host of public and private American organizations, including the U.S. Agency for International Development and the German Marshall Fund.

**REASON #5: The U.S. already benefits from the best of UNESCO.** The U.S. currently participates and enjoys full voting rights in those UNESCO programs that it considers worthwhile, including the World Heritage Commission and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. By spending no more than a few million dollars annually, the U.S. supports these activities while avoiding the added costs of UNESCO overhead. Instead of rejoining UNESCO, the U.S. should be working to spin off its worthwhile operations to non-UNESCO organizations. The IOC, for example, could become part of the World Meteorological Commission.

The U.S. has done well for ten years without belonging to UNESCO. The few truly worthwhile UNESCO activities are open to U.S. participation without U.S. membership. There is a plethora of poorly managed U.N. organizations and commissions with murky mandates and elusive goals which need the U.S. more than the U.S. needs them. UNESCO fits this description. This is no time to rejoin.

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