

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRADE

The United States has become increasingly involved in international issues that range from advancing and protecting U.S. political and economic interests to responding to global market forces and national and worldwide security threats. International Affairs and Trade helps Congress address these issues by evaluating economic, political, and security problems worldwide.

Our Work

International Affairs and Trade analyzes the effectiveness and management of U.S. foreign aid programs, evaluates the efficiency and accountability of the United Nations and related multilateral organizations, and assesses the strategies used to manage U.S. foreign affairs functions and activities. We also evaluate how trade agreements and programs serve U.S. interests and assess how the United States can influence improvements in the world's financial systems and address crises. Another of our key efforts is to determine how effective federal agencies are in combating terrorism and preventing the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Our oversight responsibilities primarily include the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and some Department of Defense functions.

We focus on achieving the following outcomes:

- improving the current process for planning, executing, and coordinating U.S. conflict interventions;
- enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of foreign aid;
- increasing congressional understanding of the benefits and limitations of multilateral organizations;
- providing options for improving overseas operations, reducing costs, and decreasing security vulnerabilities;
- providing analysis and recommendations to improve the implementation of trade agreements, trade adjustment assistance, and trade promotion;
- recommending strategies to improve accountability at international financial institutions;
- offering analysis and options for Congress to consider in debt relief funding requests;
- suggesting methods of enhancing controls over exports of U.S. technologies that could facilitate the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and
- providing better protection of U.S. borders against illegal entry and potential terrorist threats.

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Accomplishments and Key Projects

Examples of our recent accomplishments include

- encouraging the Department of State to control costs on overseas embassy construction projects, thereby avoiding more than \$90 million in unnecessary expenses;
- helping U.S. agencies improve their management of staff with foreign language skills and address likely shortages in needed foreign languages;
- reprogramming more than \$600,000 in U.S. assistance to Caribbean and Central American nations devastated by Hurricanes Mitch and George;
- prompting the U.S. government to revise development plans for Colombia, redirecting more than \$31 million to activities and regions that offer a greater likelihood of success;
- altering the flow of commercial traffic at southwest border entry points to better coordinate commercial truck inspections, and working to improve U.S.–Mexico transportation planning;
- improving federal efforts to assist small businesses in obtaining foreign patent protection for their products;
- working with the United Nations and the Department of State to reduce the risk of U.N. peacekeeping staff contracting HIV/AIDS; and
- encouraging the Department of State to help stem the flow of “conflict diamonds” while protecting the legitimate diamond industry.

Currently, we are also working to

- evaluate U.S. and international efforts to address the food crisis in Southern Africa and Afghanistan;
- identify conditions that undermine democracy and the rule of law in Latin America;
- determine whether the global fund to overcome HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria is meeting its objective to direct increased resources toward fighting these diseases;
- analyze U.S. and foreign government efforts to safeguard international shipments before they reach the United States;
- assess Department of State controls over visa issuance since the September 11 attacks;
- analyze U.S. public diplomacy and international broadcasting activities that support the antiterrorism campaign;
- advise Congress on issues concerning NATO enlargement;
- monitor China’s commitments to follow World Trade Organization rules, reduce tariffs, and lower trade barriers;
- monitor ongoing trade negotiations, including those to establish a free Trade Area of the Americas;
- determine the status of International Monetary Fund reforms aimed at better anticipating and preventing financial crises; and
- assess U.S. government attempts to control access to sensitive technologies that can be used to help create weapons of mass destruction.