



US to Quit UNESCO

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Why in News?

The **United States** announced its decision to **withdraw from** the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#), just **two years after rejoining in 2023**, citing alleged **bias against Israel**.

What are Key Facts Regarding UNESCO?

- **About: UNESCO** is a specialized agency of the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) that promotes **peace through international cooperation in education, science, and culture**.
 - Headquartered in **Paris**, it has **194 Member States** and **12 Associate Members**.
- **History: UNESCO** was **founded on 16th November 1945**, and its **first General Conference** was held in **Paris** between **November and December 1946**.
 - **India is a founding member** of the organization.
- **Role and Mandate:**
 - Ensure **inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning** opportunities for all (aligned with **SDG 4**).
 - Protect **tangible and intangible cultural heritage (World Heritage List)**.
 - Promote **scientific research, sustainable development, and use of science for peace and humanity**.
 - Enhance **mutual understanding and tolerance**.

What is the History of US Quitting UNESCO?

- **US Quitting UNESCO:** This is the third time that the United States has left UNESCO, and the second time during a Trump administration.
- **Timeline of Exits and Reentries:**
 - **First Exit (1984, Reagan Administration):** The **US withdrew from UNESCO**, citing **mismanagement, corruption**, and alignment with **Soviet interests** during the **Cold War**.
 - **Second Exit (2017, Trump's First Term):** The **US exited UNESCO**, citing **anti-Israel bias**, especially after the agency voted to include **Palestine** as a **member state** in **2011**.
 - **Third Exit (2025, Trump's Second Term):** **President Trump** announced a **second withdrawal** from UNESCO by **December 2026**, following rejoining under the **Biden administration** in **2023**.

What can be the Potential Impact of US Withdrawal from UNESCO?

- **Global Impact:**
 - **Financial Crunch: US exit** creates a significant **budget gap**, threatening **education, heritage, and climate research** programs.
 - E.g. The **US and Israel** halted **UNESCO funding** after its **2011 decision** to include **Palestine as a member state**.

- **Geopolitical Power Shift:** China may dominate **UNESCO's agenda**, promoting **pro-China narratives**.
- **Setback to Science & Education:** **US absence** reduces support for **AI ethics**, **climate science**, and **girls' education** programs globally e.g. hampering UNESCO's **STEM Clinics** organised to familiarize girls with **STEM education**.
- **Crisis in Multilateralism:** The **US' unpredictable disengagements disrupt global cooperation**, weakening multilateral institutions and leaving developing countries **frustrated by inconsistent international support and policies**.
- **Impact on India:**
 - **Opportunities:** India can **expand its diplomatic influence** in UNESCO by shaping global agendas on **culture, education, and AI ethics**.
 - It can also **project soft power**, promote **South-South cooperation**, and advocate for more **Indian sites** on the **World Heritage List**.
 - **Challenges:** **Funding cuts** may impact key Indian projects at sites like **Nalanda** and **Sundarbans**, while **education programs** face shortfalls.
 - Rising **Chinese influence** in UNESCO and pressure to **increase contributions** could strain India's **resources** and **geopolitical balance**.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Inclusive Governance:** UNESCO should limit **geopolitical interference** in its functioning to stay focused on core goals like **education and cultural preservation**.
- **Sustainable Framework:** Adopt **equitable funding models** and address **emerging issues** such as **AI ethics**, **digital learning**, and **climate education**.
- **Localized Implementation:** Ensure **transparent governance**, boost **South-South cooperation**, and support **regional programs** for tailored, impactful action.

Drishti Mains Question:

Critically evaluate the impact of the US withdrawal from UNESCO on the organization's functioning.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. What are the aims and objectives of the McBride Commission of UNESCO? What is India's position on these? (2016)