

GAO

United States General Accounting Office

Report to the Chairman, Select
Committee on Hunger, House of
Representatives

March 1991

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

U.S. Contributions for the 1980s



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National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-242780

March 21, 1991

The Honorable Tony P. Hall
Chairman, Select Committee
on Hunger
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter responds to your request for information on U.S. contributions for the care and relief of the world's refugees during the 1980s. You asked that we provide information on (1) overall U.S. expenditures for refugee-related activities, including refugee admissions and resettlement in the United States and contributions for assisting refugees overseas; (2) U.S. contributions to international relief organizations for the care and feeding of refugees living in camps and in other situations overseas; and (3) the geographic distribution of U.S. refugee assistance overseas.

Results in Brief

From fiscal years 1980 through 1989, the United States contributed about \$9.7 billion in cash, commodities, and in-kind contributions for refugee assistance. About two-thirds of this amount was spent on the admission and resettlement of refugees in the United States. U.S. funding for refugee assistance overseas comprised a smaller share of total refugee aid (about one-third), but the annual level of this assistance nearly doubled to \$418 million by the end of the 1980s.

The United States was the largest donor to all but one of the four major international refugee relief organizations, annually contributing an average of over 20 percent of their total budgets during the decade.

The Near East received more U.S. aid—41 percent of the total spent on refugee assistance overseas—than any other region during the 1980s. However, refugees in East Asia and Africa received the greatest shares of U.S. food aid.

Background

According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, a nongovernmental organization, the worldwide refugee population more than doubled, from an estimated 7 million to 15 million, during the 1980s. A "refugee" is defined by the Refugee Act of 1980 as a person who has fled his or

her home country because of persecution, or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The President has determined that for purposes of admission to the United States, certain persons living in the Soviet Union, Rumania, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, Latin America, and the Caribbean also may be classified as refugees, even though they have not fled their home country.

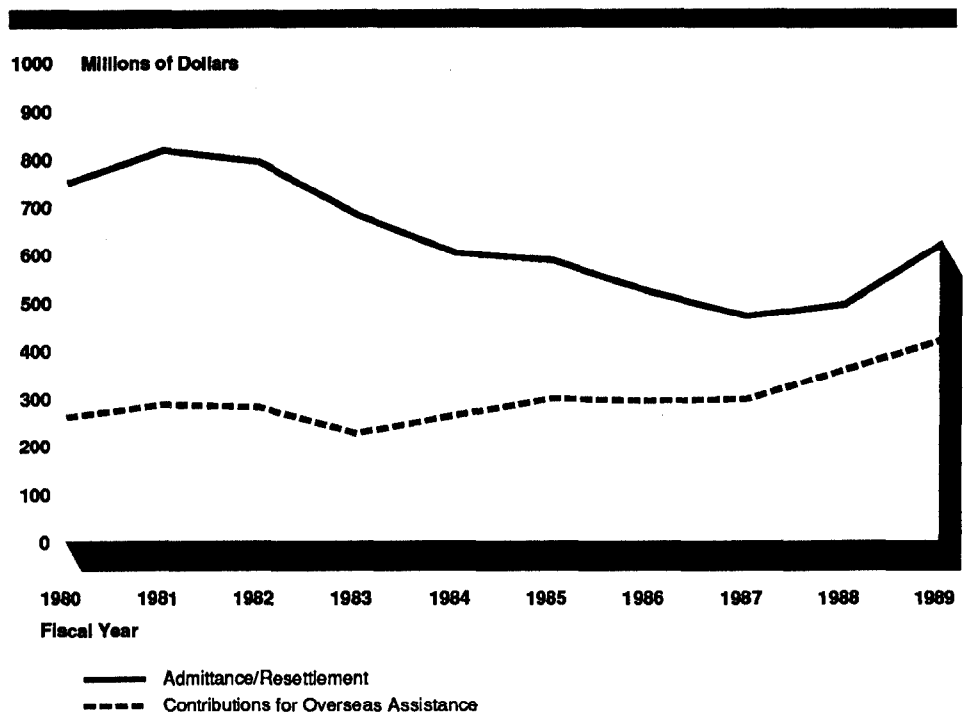
The major U.S. agencies that provide refugee assistance are the Departments of State, Health and Human Services, and Education; the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and the Agency for International Development (AID). Appendix I describes the roles of U.S. agencies in providing aid to refugees.

Funds for Resettlement in the United States Comprised Largest Share of U.S. Refugee Assistance

Of the \$9.7 billion contributed by the United States for refugee assistance in the 1980s, about \$6.3 billion was spent on admitting and resettling about 973,000 refugees in the United States. Another \$3 billion—including about \$794 million in food aid—was provided to various international relief organizations, private voluntary organizations, and host governments for the care and feeding of refugees overseas. The balance, about \$378 million, was used for other purposes, such as contributions for the resettlement of Jewish refugees in Israel, for contributions to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Organization for Migration, and for administrative costs. Appendix II lists U.S. funding for refugee assistance during the 1980s.

Funding levels for refugee admissions and resettlement in the United States declined during most of the 1980s, while funding for overseas assistance increased, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: U.S. Funding for Refugee Assistance



Note: Admittance/resettlement consists of funds from the Departments of State, Health and Human Services, and Education and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Overseas assistance consists of funds from the Department of State and AID.

Annual funding for refugee admissions and resettlement peaked in 1981 at \$816 million, decreased to \$470 million during the next 6 years as fewer refugees were admitted to the United States, and then increased in 1988 to \$494 million and in 1989 to \$617 million. This increase corresponded with an increase in refugee admissions from 64,828 in 1987 to 105,688 in 1989, primarily to accommodate the increased admissions of Soviet refugees (see app. III).

U.S. funding for refugee assistance overseas increased from \$259 million in 1980 to \$418 million in 1989. Most of this growth, particularly in 1988 and 1989, was in food aid and emergency assistance funds. Cash contributions from the State Department's Migration and Refugee Assistance account—the principal source of U.S. donations for refugees overseas—remained relatively level throughout most of the decade (see app. IV).

United States Was the Largest Donor to Relief Organizations During the 1980s

About \$2.2 billion of the \$3 billion in U.S. assistance to refugees overseas was in the form of direct financial contributions to international relief organizations, primarily the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the United Nations Border Relief Operation. Table 1 lists the cumulative U.S. contributions to these organizations in the 1980s.

Table 1: U.S. Contributions to International Refugee Assistance Organizations (1980-1989)

Dollars in million

Organization	Amount	Percentage of total received ^a
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	\$1,175	29
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	657	34
International Committee of the Red Cross	306	21
United Nations Border Relief Operation	101	30
Total	\$2,239	

^aPercentage is based on total contributions received by each organization.

The United States has been the largest government donor to these organizations, except for the U.N. Border Relief Operation. However, during the last half of the decade, annual U.S. contributions to these organizations declined both in terms of amounts and as proportions of their annual contributions received.

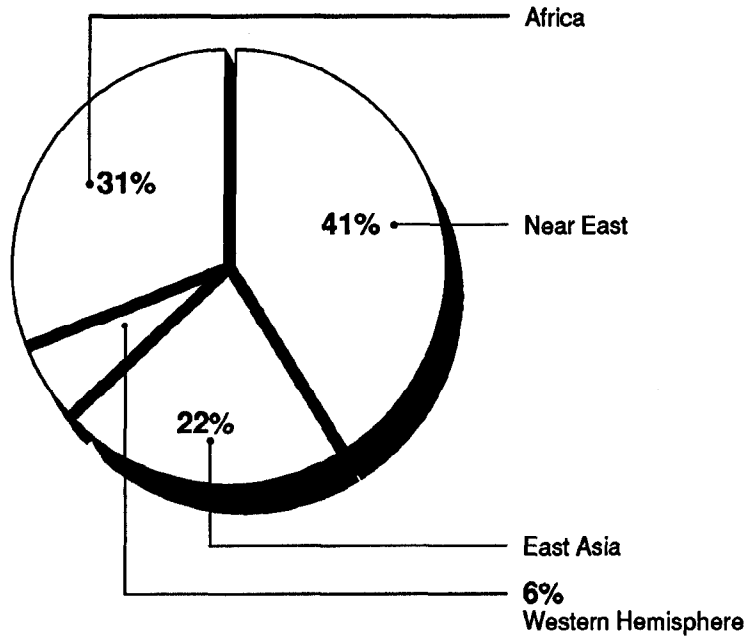
No standard formula is used to determine the amounts contributed. These amounts are determined by the availability of funds, the nature and urgency of the needs, U.S. foreign policy interests in a particular situation, economic conditions in asylum countries, and responses of other donors.

U.S. contributions to these four organizations are discussed more fully in appendix V.

Regional Distribution of Overseas Assistance

According to State Department and AID data, the United States' \$3 billion in overseas refugee assistance contributed during the 1980s was distributed regionally as shown in figure 2. The contributions included cash, commodity, and in-kind contributions. The regional distribution of food aid was estimated, using Public Law 480, title II refugee feeding statistics, because U.S. food donations were not always earmarked geographically or for refugees.

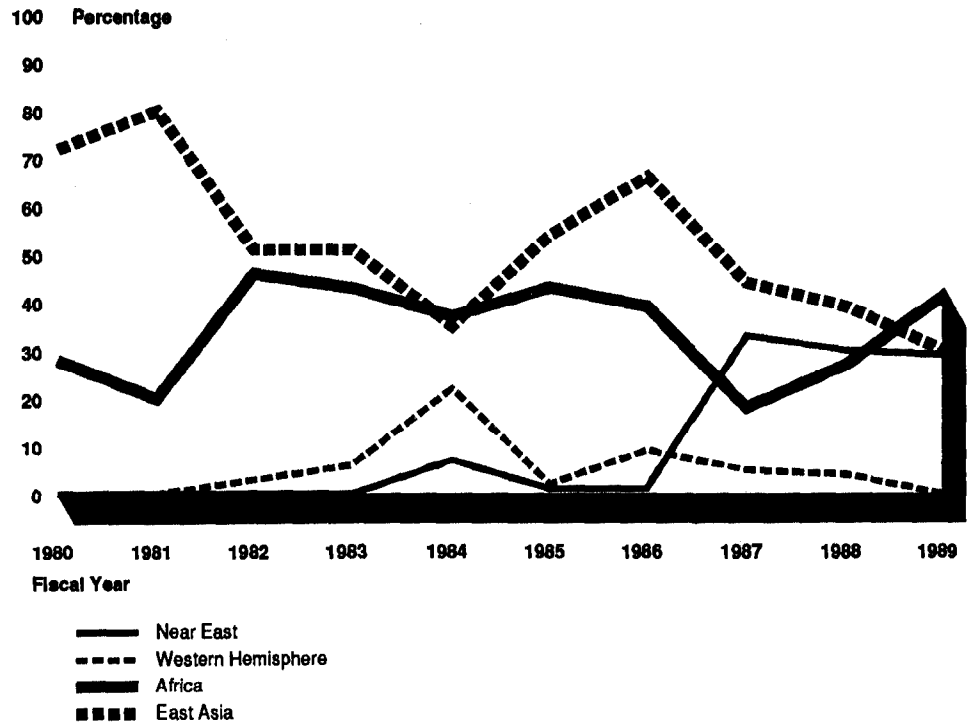
Figure 2: Regional Distribution of U.S. Contributions for Refugee Assistance Overseas



U.S. Food Aid

The geographic distribution of the \$794 million in U.S. food aid to refugees differed from the distribution of assistance overall. On the basis of refugee feeding data for fiscal years 1981 to 1989 from the annual reports on Public Law 480, we estimated that 49 percent of U.S. food donations for refugees went to East Asia, 31 percent to Africa, 16 percent to the Near East, and 4 percent to the Western Hemisphere. Figure 3 shows the trends in food aid over the decade.

Figure 3: Estimated Regional Distribution of U.S. Food Donations



Scope and Methodology

We obtained information on U.S. expenditures for refugees from the Departments of State and Health and Human Services, the Agency for International Development, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The State Department also provided computerized data on funds obligated from the Migration and Refugee Assistance account and the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account for fiscal years 1983 through 1989. Such information was not computerized prior to 1983. We verified the accuracy of the computerized information by comparing the obligation data to disbursement data. We also analyzed the obligation data to determine specific uses of the funds, recipients, and changes occurring over the 7-year period.

We performed our work between June and December 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. As requested, we did not obtain official agency comments on this report. However, we discussed the information in this report with agency officials and incorporated their comments where appropriate.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, no further distribution of this report will be made until 30 days from its issue date. At that time we will send copies to the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on the Judiciary, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; the Secretaries of State, Health and Human Services, and Education; the Administrator, Agency for International Development; the Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions, please call me at (202) 275-5790. Staff members who made major contributions to this report were David R. Martin, Assistant Director, and Susan Gibbs and MaeWanda Micheal-Jackson, Senior Evaluators.

Sincerely yours,



Harold J. Johnson
Director, Foreign Economic
Assistance Issues

Contents

Letter		1
Appendix I U.S. Policy and Roles of Agencies in Assisting Refugees		10
Appendix II U.S. Refugee Program Funding		12
Appendix III Refugee Admissions Into the United States		13
Appendix IV Migration and Refugee Assistance Account	Proportion of Funds Allocated for Overseas Refugee Assistance Declined	14
	Regional Distribution of Program Funds	15
Appendix V U.S. Donations to International Refugee Relief Organizations	U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees	17
	U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	18
	International Committee of the Red Cross	20
	U.N. Border Relief Operation	22
Figures	Figure 1: U.S. Funding for Refugee Assistance	3
	Figure 2: Regional Distribution of U.S. Contributions for Refugee Assistance Overseas	5
	Figure 3: Estimated Regional Distribution of U.S. Food Donations	6
	Figure IV.1: Relative Shares of Migration and Refugee Assistance Account Funding Allocated to Refugee Admissions and Refugee Assistance Programs	14
	Figure IV.2: Regional Distribution of Refugee Assistance Program Contributions	16

Contents

Figure V.1: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees	17
Figure V.2: U.S. Contributions to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees	18
Figure V.3: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	19
Figure V.4: U.S. Contributions to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	20
Figure V.5: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to International Committee of the Red Cross	21
Figure V.6: U.S. Contributions to International Committee of the Red Cross	22
Figure V.7: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to U.N. Border Relief Operation	23
Figure V.8: U.S. Contributions to U.N. Border Relief Operation	24

Tables

Table 1: U.S. Contributions to International Refugee Assistance Organizations (1980-1989)	4
Table I.1: Migration and Refugee Assistance Account Programs	11
Table IV.1: Migration and Refugee Assistance Account Funding	15

Abbreviations

AID Agency for International Development

U.S. Policy and Roles of Agencies in Assisting Refugees

The United States has played a leading role within the international community in responding to the needs of refugees. Its policy is to contribute to international relief programs for refugees in countries of first asylum and to encourage refugees, where possible, to return to their homelands once the situation that caused them to flee improves. When safe voluntary repatriation cannot take place, the United States promotes the resettlement of refugees in the country of first asylum or elsewhere in the region. The United States also accepts for admission certain refugees for whom other resettlement alternatives do not exist.

The Refugee Act of 1980 establishes procedures for annual and emergency refugee admissions to the United States and authorizes federal assistance to resettle them in the United States. The total annual number of refugee admissions and the allocation of these numbers among regions of the world are determined at the beginning of each fiscal year by the President after consultation with the Congress. According to the Department of State, the U.S. government financed the admission and resettlement of 973,272 federally funded refugees from fiscal years 1980 through 1989 (see app. III). An additional 119,316 federally funded refugees were admitted to the United States in fiscal year 1990, and as many as 121,000 may be admitted in fiscal year 1991.

The Departments of State, Health and Human Services, and Education; the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and the Agency for International Development (AID) are the major agencies that pay for refugee processing and admissions, resettlements, and overseas assistance. The State Department, through its Bureau for Refugee Programs, manages two accounts funded under the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as amended. The largest account, called the Migration and Refugee Assistance account, receives annual appropriations for five programs, which are described in table I.1.

**Appendix I
U.S. Policy and Roles of Agencies in
Assisting Refugees**

Table I.1: Migration and Refugee Assistance Account Programs

Program	Purpose
Refugee Admissions	Screening and processing of refugees for admittance to the United States and funding for initial resettlement.
Refugee Assistance	Contributions to international and private voluntary organizations caring for refugees outside the United States.
Refugees to Israel	Grants to the United Israel Appeal to finance programs assisting Jewish refugees who are resettling in Israel.
International Organizations	Contributions to the regular non-emergency budgets of the International Organization for Migration and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
Administration	Funds for State Department's personnel and operating costs for managing refugee activities.

The act also authorizes a permanent **Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance** account of up to \$50 million. Emergency funds are drawn upon at the President's discretion, without fiscal year limitations, to supplement the Migration and Refugee Assistance account when unexpected urgent appeals for humanitarian relief arise and the President determines such assistance to be in the national interest. Emergency funds usually have been used for overseas refugee assistance.

The roles of other U.S. agencies in assisting refugees include the following:

- The Department of Health and Human Services is the principal source of federal funding for the domestic costs incurred in resettling refugees in the United States. Under the Refugee Act of 1980, eligible refugees may receive cash, medical assistance, and support services designed to facilitate their successful resettlement.
- The Department of Education provides funding for the special educational needs of refugee children who are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools.
- The Immigration and Naturalization Service provides funding for interviewing and processing refugee applicants for resettlement in the United States.
- AID, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, manages U.S. food aid and related transportation costs, provided under Public Law 480, title II and section 416 of the Agricultural Act of 1949, to the World Food Program and other organizations involved in feeding refugees. In addition, AID has made some cash contributions for refugee relief efforts, primarily in Cyprus and Africa.

U.S. Refugee Program Funding

Dollar in Millions											
Program	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Total
Admittance/resettlement											
Department of State											
MRA ^a	\$269	\$204	\$146	\$92	\$98	\$103	\$105	\$109	\$120	\$204	\$1,450
ERMA ^a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	6
Department of Health and Human Services											
	476	585	596	567	485	454	393	336	347	380	4,619
Department of Education ^b											
	0	23	45	17	12	22	16	16	15	16	182
Immigration and Naturalization Service											
	4	8	5	6	6	7	7	9	10	13	71
Subtotal	749	816	792	682	601	586	521	470	494	617	6,328
Overseas assistance											
Department of State											
MRA ^a	141	167	233	205	203	195	200	195	176	193	1,908
ERMA ^a	33	0	0	0	5	35	12	9	11	47	152
AID											
Cash ^c	15	13	10	7	11	20	11	14	10	11	122
Food ^d	70	105	37	13	44	48	70	79	161	167	794
Subtotal	259	285	280	225	263	298	293	297	358	418	2,976
Other refugee assistance											
Department of State ^e											
	35	41	29	31	30	48	29	43	43	49	378
Total	\$1,043	\$1,142	\$1,101	\$938	\$894	\$932	\$843	\$810	\$895	\$1,084	\$9,682

Note: Table includes only the major federal programs that either focused specifically on refugees or whose refugee costs could be quantified. It is not possible to capture all costs associated with refugees because statistics for some federal programs do not account separately for refugees relative to the general population being served.

^aMRA is the abbreviation for the Migration and Refugee Assistance account, and ERMA is the abbreviation for the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account.

^bFunds for the refugee children educational programs were obligated by the Department of Health and Human Services through an interagency agreement with the Department of Education until fiscal year 1986. The Refugee Assistance Extension Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-605) transferred authority for this program to the Department of Education.

^cFunding includes AID cash donations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

^dThese statistics are estimates of the food commodities and funds for related expenses that were donated through AID and the Department of Agriculture to international organizations, private voluntary groups, and host governments and that were used to feed refugees.

^eFigures include Migration and Refugee Assistance account funds and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account funds obligated for resettling refugees in Israel, for contributions to the ordinary budgets of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Organization for Migration, and for State Department administrative expenses.

Refugee Admissions Into the United States

Year	Federally funded	Privately funded^a	Total
1980	207,116	0	207,116
1981	159,252	0	159,252
1982	97,355	0	97,355
1983	61,681	0	61,681
1984	71,113	0	71,113
1985	68,045	0	68,045
1986	62,440	0	62,440
1987	64,828	0	64,828
1988	75,754	733	76,487
1989	105,688	1,550	107,238
1990	119,316	3,009	122,325
Total	1,092,588	5,292	1,097,880

^aThe federal government does not pay any of the basic costs of admission and resettlement for privately funded admissions.

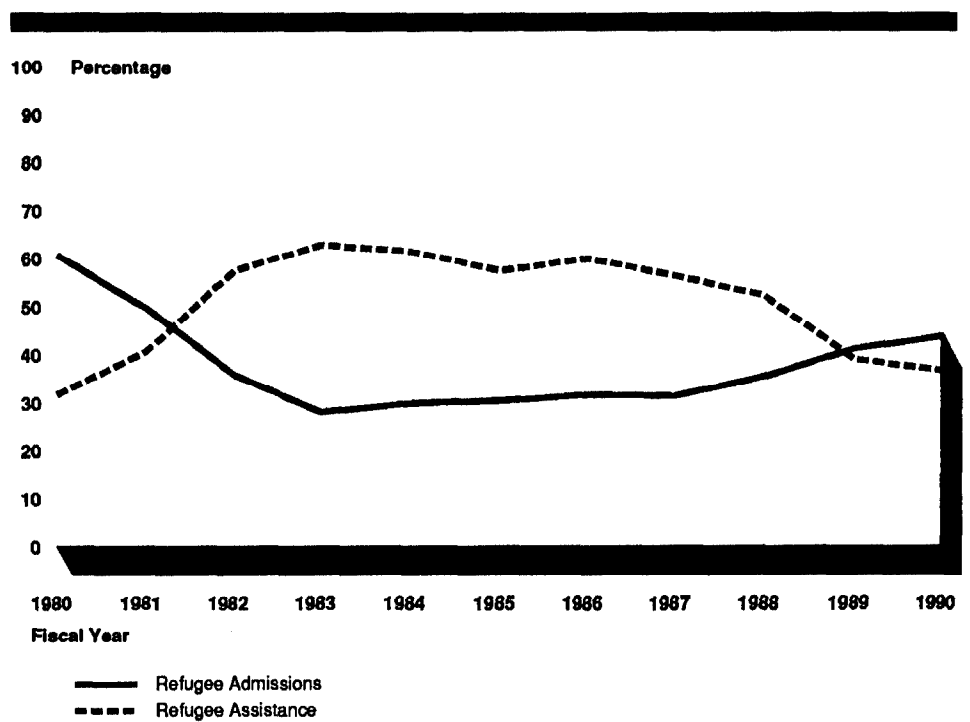
Migration and Refugee Assistance Account

The Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance account provides funding for both refugee admissions and overseas assistance to refugees. Because this account is the principal source of U.S. contributions for the care and maintenance of refugees overseas, the proportion of funds allocated for refugee admissions determines the amount of funds that is available for overseas refugee assistance.

Proportion of Funds Allocated for Overseas Refugee Assistance Declined

The program for overseas refugee assistance received the largest allocation from the Migration and Refugee Assistance account during the 1980s: about 49 percent of the total funds available. However, the percentage share of funds allocated annually to overseas refugee assistance began declining in 1983, and the proportion allocated to the Refugee Admissions program increased, as shown in figure IV.1.

Figure IV.1: Relative Shares of Migration and Refugee Assistance Account Funding Allocated to Refugee Admissions and Refugee Assistance Programs



Since 1983, the Refugee Admissions program has grown both in actual dollars and in its share of the total Migration and Refugee Assistance account. From 1980 through 1983, funding for refugee admissions declined from \$269 million to \$92 million. Since then, however, program

**Appendix IV
Migration and Refugee Assistance Account**

funding has steadily increased, and in 1989 it rose to \$204 million, primarily because of the influx of Soviet refugees. Table IV.1 shows funding levels for fiscal years 1980 to 1990.

Table IV.1: Migration and Refugee Assistance Funding

Dollars in millions

Account	Fiscal year											Total
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	
Migration and Refugee Assistance												
Admissions Assistance	\$269.2	\$204.1	\$146.1	\$91.5	\$98.4	\$103.4	\$105.3	\$108.7	\$119.5	\$203.7	\$233.9	\$1,683.8
East Asia	100.0	52.8	35.6	33.5	35.4	35.3	32.9	31.7	26.7	29.5	23.8	437.2
Africa	35.7	57.4	67.2	59.8	58.6	55.0	66.0	60.5	56.7	71.0	55.0	642.9
Near East	3.8	50.9	117.4	97.9	95.0	89.7	85.0	87.5	80.3	81.8	71.9	861.2
Western Hemisphere	1.2	3.5	13.0	14.0	14.0	15.0	15.8	15.1	12.4	11.0	35.8	150.8
Resettlement ^a	0	2.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10.0	12.4
Subtotal	140.7	167.0	233.2	205.2	203.0	195.0	199.7	194.8	176.1	193.3	196.5	2,104.5
Refugees to Israel	25.0	25.0	12.5	12.5	12.5	27.5	12.0	25.0	25.0	28.0	29.9	234.9
Other international organizations	5.1	10.2	9.4	11.5	9.6	7.0	9.5	9.9	9.7	12.6	11.0	105.5
Administration	5.2	6.0	6.6	7.0	7.6	8.1	7.7	8.5	8.0	8.0	8.2	80.9
Total	445.2	412.3	407.8	327.7	331.1	341.0	334.2	346.9	338.3	445.6	479.5	4,209.6
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance	33.1	0	0	0	5.0	40.0	12.0	8.5	12.8	50.8	58.8	221.0
Grand total	\$478.3	\$412.3	\$407.8	\$327.7	\$336.1	\$381.0	\$346.2	\$355.4	\$351.1	\$496.4	\$538.3	\$4,430.6

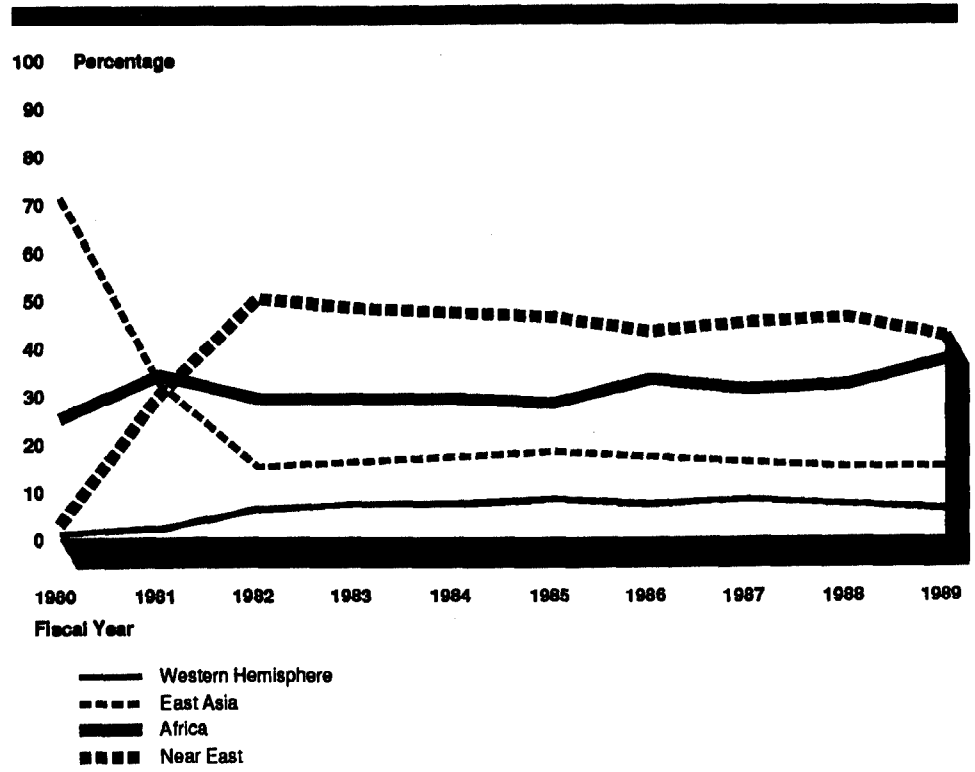
^aResettlement assistance providing funding to help resettle refugees in the country or region of asylum.

Regional Distribution of Program Funds

All of the overseas refugee assistance funds that were contributed through the Migration and Refugee Assistance account were earmarked for use in one of four geographic regions: Africa, East Asia, Near East, and Western Hemisphere. Overall, during the 1980s refugee assistance for the Near East amounted to about 41 percent of the funds, followed by Africa at 31 percent, East Asia at 22 percent, and the Western Hemisphere at 6 percent. Figure IV.2 shows trends in U.S. contributions under the Migration and Refugee Assistance account for overseas assistance.

Appendix IV
Migration and Refugee Assistance Account

Figure IV.2: Regional Distribution of Refugee Assistance Program Contributions



Note: Figure does not reflect \$2.4 million obligated in 1981 for refugee resettlement in countries or regions of asylum.

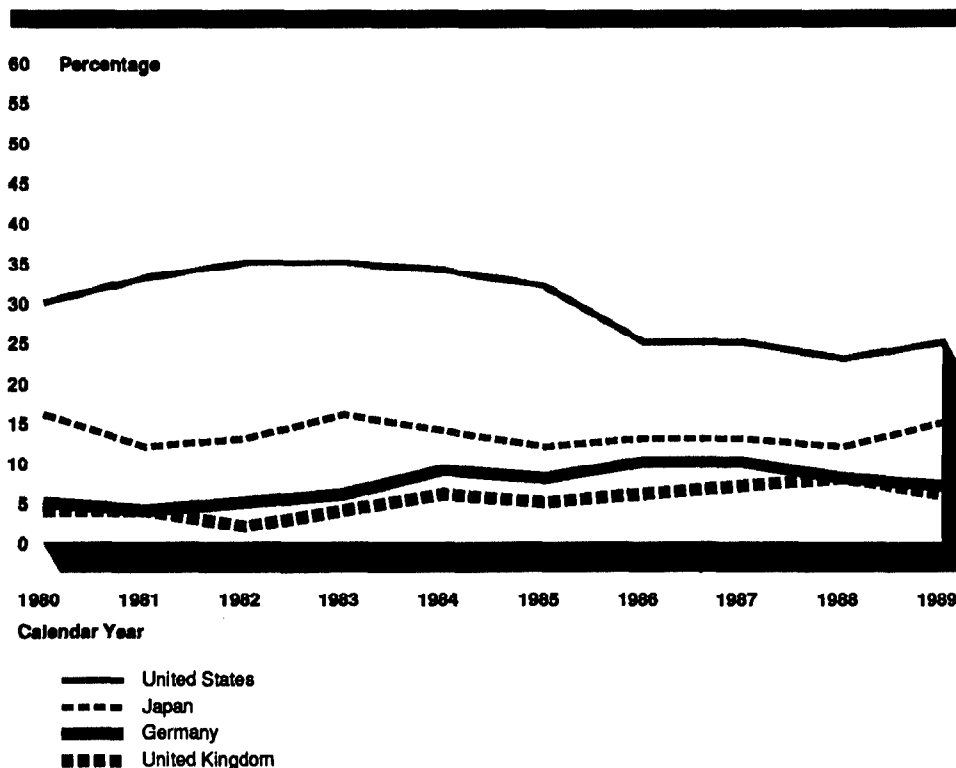
U.S. Donations to International Refugee Relief Organizations

More than 90 percent of U.S. contributions for the care of refugees overseas were contributed to international organizations. The largest recipients were the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the United Nations Border Relief Operation. Together, they received approximately \$2.2 billion in U.S. cash and food aid during the 1980s.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees

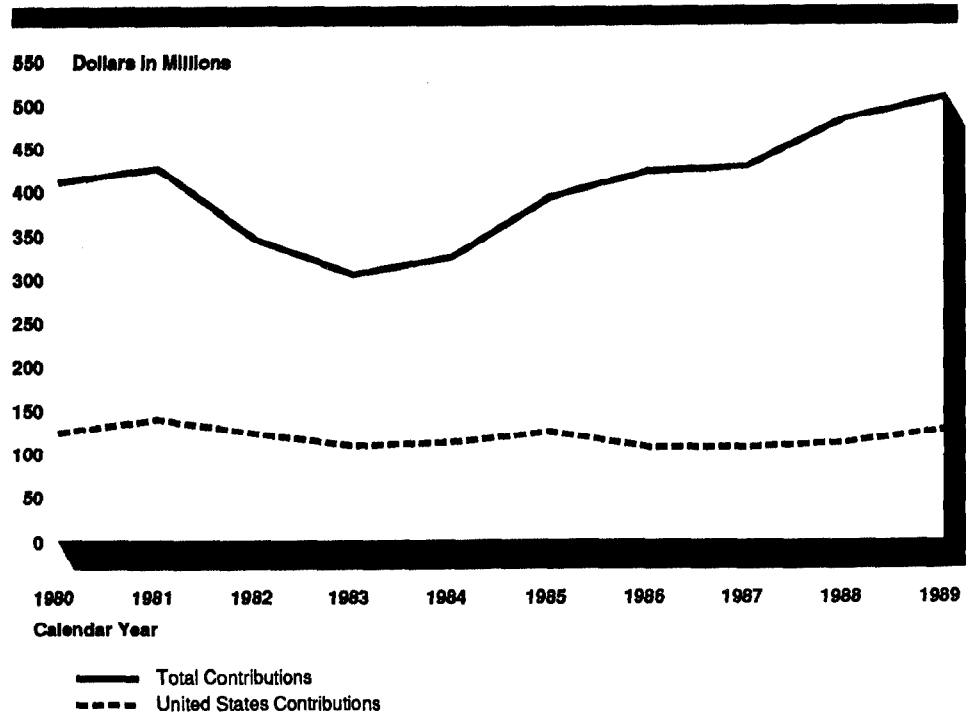
The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has worldwide responsibility for the protection and care and maintenance of refugees, as well as for facilitating their voluntary repatriation or assimilation in new countries. This organization has been the chief recipient of U.S. refugee assistance contributions, receiving almost \$1.2 billion between 1980 and 1989.

Figure V.1: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees



Note: Percentages are based on total contributions to U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.
 Source: U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Figure V.2: U.S. Contributions to the U.N.
 High Commissioner for Refugees



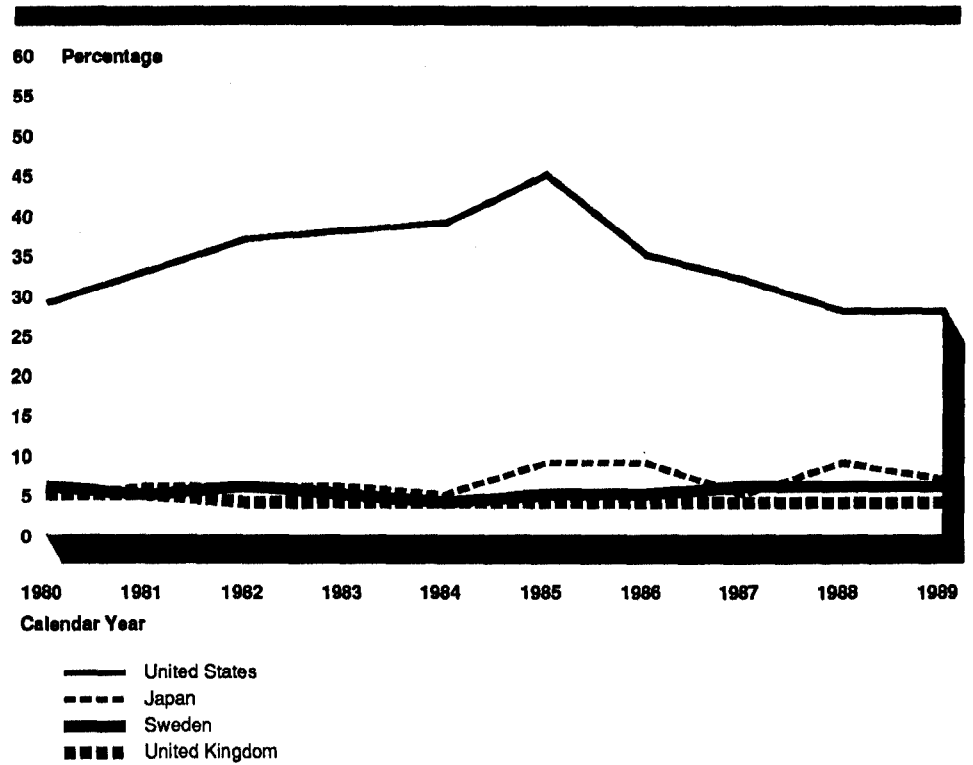
Source: U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

The U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East assists the large Palestine refugee population in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. More than 2 million refugees are registered to receive education, vocational training, relief services, and medical assistance. Since this organization began operations in 1950, the United States has been the major donor. Between 1980 and 1989, the United States contributed \$657 million, about 34 percent of the organization's total contributions. In comparison, the second largest donor contributed an average of 7 percent.

Appendix V
U.S. Donations to International Refugee
Relief Organizations

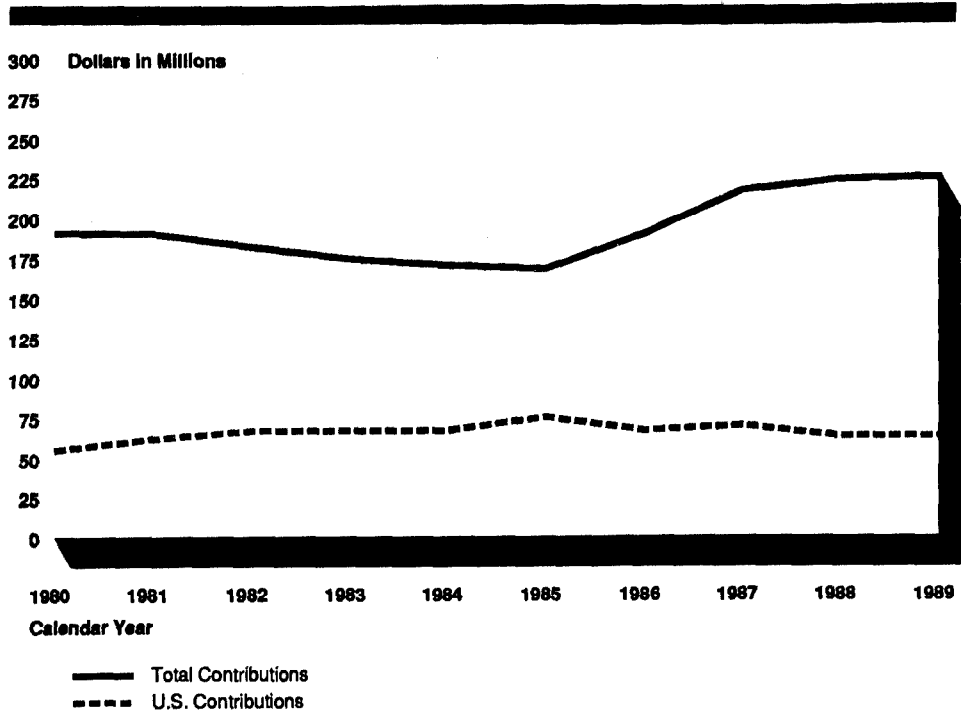
Figure V.3: Relative Contributions of Top
Four Government Donors to U.N. Relief
and Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East



Note: Percentages are based on total contributions to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Source: U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Figure V.4: U.S. Contributions to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East



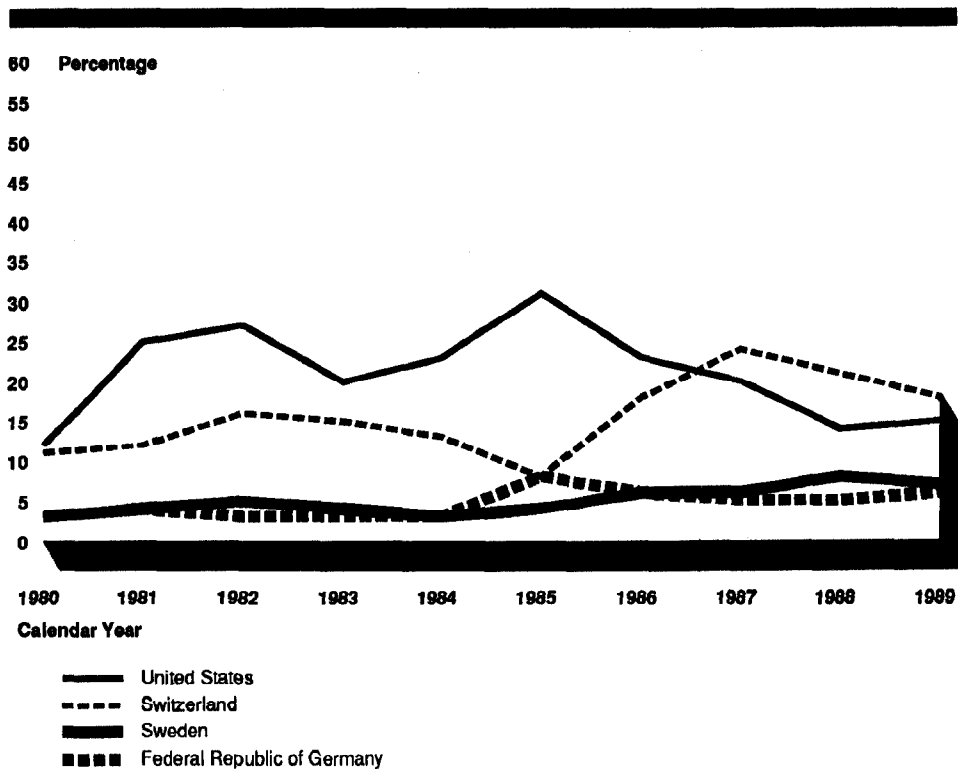
Source: U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an internationally-funded and independent humanitarian institution that acts as a neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict. It provides relief assistance to refugees and plays a key protective role as a neutral party by encouraging governments and other combatant factions to abide by the Geneva Conventions. The United States has been the principal contributor to this organization, donating \$306 million between 1980 and 1989, although annual U.S. contribution levels declined over the last half of the decade.

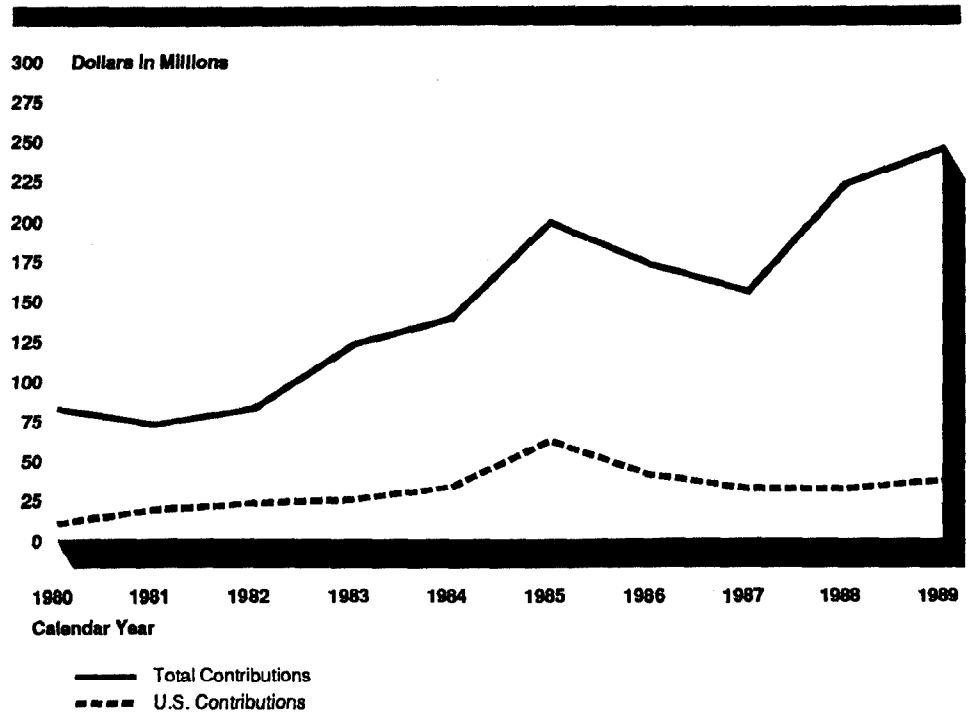
**Appendix V
U.S. Donations to International Refugee
Relief Organizations**

Figure V.5: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to International Committee of the Red Cross



Note: Percentages are based on total contributions to the International Committee of the Red Cross.
Source: International Committee of the Red Cross.

Figure V.6: U.S. Contributions to
 International Committee of the Red
 Cross



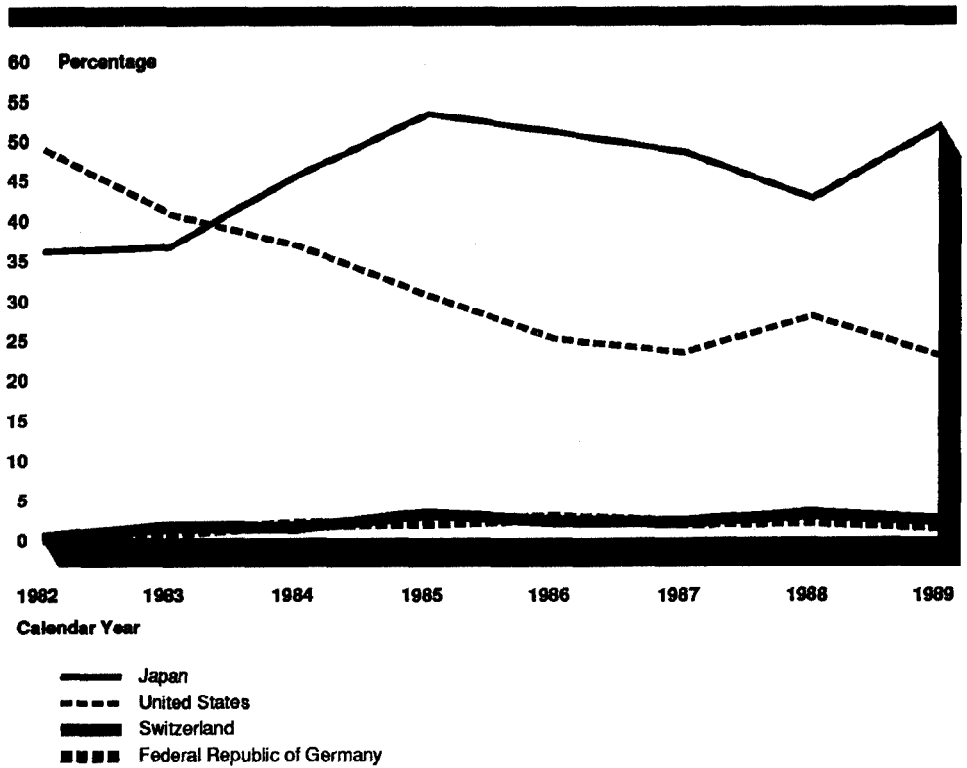
Source: International Committee of the Red Cross.

U.N. Border Relief Operation

The U.N. Border Relief Operation was established in 1982 to care for displaced Cambodians on the Thai-Cambodian border by providing them with food, shelter, water, and relief supplies. The U.S. contributions to this organization have remained relatively stable during the past 8 years, averaging about \$12.5 million annually. Overall, the United States contributed about \$101 million between 1982 and 1989, but Japan has been the largest contributor to the Border Relief Operation.

**Appendix V
U.S. Donations to International Refugee
Relief Organizations**

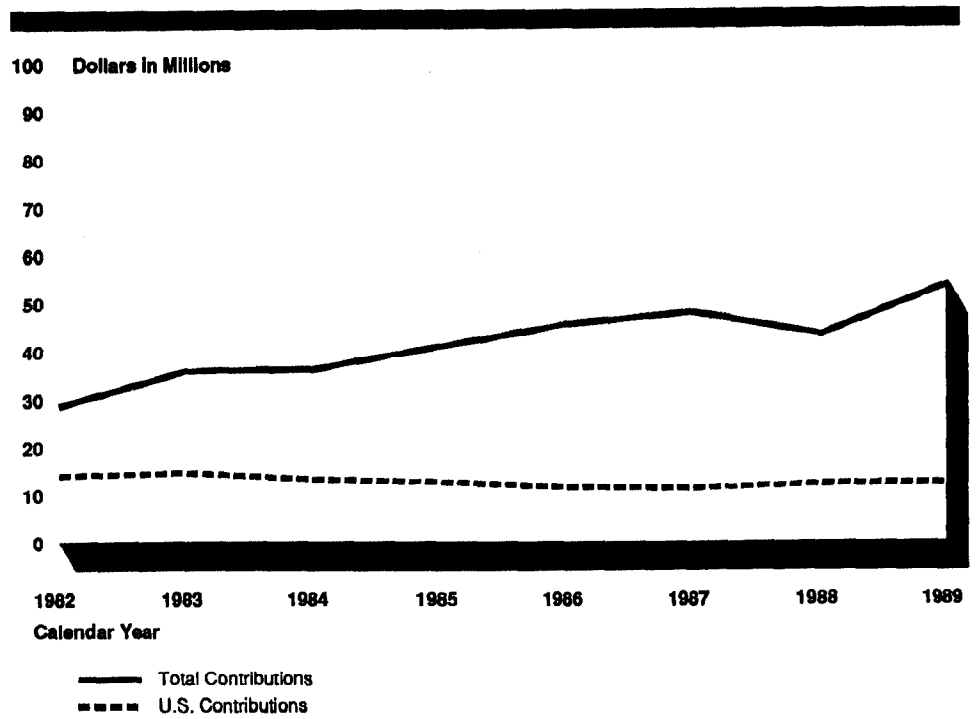
Figure V.7: Relative Contributions of Top Four Government Donors to U.N. Border Relief Operation



Note: Percentages are based on total contributions to the U.N. Border Relief Operation.
Source: U.N. Border Relief Operation.

Appendix V
U.S. Donations to International Refugee
Relief Organizations

Figure V.8: U.S. Contributions to U.N.
Border Relief Operation



Source: U.N. Border Relief Operation.

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