

# FOREIGN POLICY

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## INTRODUCTION



In the modern world, it is a daunting task for the United States—or any nation—to pursue priorities and achieve important goals on its own. The fight against terrorism, the growth of the economy, the eradication of disease, and the protection of the environment are just a few of the issues that cross international borders—issues that often require action by multiple nations in the global community.

How the United States gets what it wants on the international stage is complicated; how the United States decides what it wants can be even more so. In this chapter, we will examine the principles and practices that shape foreign policy, or the strategy of dealing with other nations. We will study the various players and tools of foreign policy, scrutinize the competing interests at stake, and consider the following controversial issue:

- Should the United States downsize its role in global affairs?

*“Human rights is the soul of our foreign policy, because human rights is the very soul of our sense of nationhood.”*

—Jimmy Carter

## THE MAJOR PLAYERS OF FOREIGN POLICY



The framers of the Constitution were deliberately vague when they outlined the powers of the federal government in conducting foreign policy. Anxious to prevent the rise of a new monarchy, the founding fathers distributed the powers of foreign policy to both the legislative and executive branches, creating a system of checks and balances to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.<sup>1</sup>

*“International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”*

—Hans J. Morgenthau

**The Powers of Congress.** Article I of the Constitution established the legislative branch, creating a Congress with two chambers—the Senate and the House of Representatives. It also outlined several congressional powers that relate to foreign policy. According to Article I of the Constitution, it is the responsibility of Congress:

- To declare war
- To raise and support armies
- To provide and maintain a navy

- To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces
- To regulate commerce with foreign nations
- To lay and collect taxes to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States
- To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper<sup>2</sup>

Congress also has several foreign policy duties that specifically check the power of the executive branch. Diplomatic nominees put forward by the president and treaties signed with foreign nations must earn Senate approval. Congress appropriates funding to the military and the diplomatic agencies and departments, allowing lawmakers to determine how—and on which foreign policy initiatives—federal dollars are spent. Congress can also conduct investigations of foreign policy concerns and create or eliminate executive agencies, as it did when it established the Department of Homeland Security in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

**The Powers of the President.** Article II of the Constitution, which created the office of president of the United States, outlined several presidential powers that relate to foreign policy. Under Article II, it is the responsibility of the president:

- To serve as commander in chief of the army and navy
- To make treaties (by and with the advice and consent of the Senate)
- To nominate and appoint ambassadors and other public ministers and consuls (by and with the advice and consent of the Senate)
- To receive ambassadors and other public ministers<sup>4</sup>

Presidents exercise several powers that are implied in the Constitution as well. The power to “receive ambassadors and other public ministers” has long been interpreted as a general power to conduct diplomacy with other nations, and some presidents have applied the authority of “commander in chief” to the use of military force. Congress has also passed laws to give the president specific powers, such as the authority to impose sanctions on foreign entities, as established by the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977.<sup>5</sup>

In this two-branch system of conducting foreign policy, there can be tension and overlap between the priorities and actions of Congress and those of the president. For example, Congress has the power to declare war, but it has done so only 11 times in history.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, such as the wars in Korea and Vietnam, presidents have ordered the use of military force without an official declaration of war. Congress also holds the power to regulate foreign trade, but at times lawmakers have allowed the president to negotiate trade deals within certain parameters. And due to the difficulties associated with making treaties (such as gaining Senate approval), some presidents have forged multinational agreements without Senate consent. In 2015, for example, President Barack Obama negotiated the climate pact known as the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal without Senate consent, as neither was an official treaty. This fact made it simpler for President Donald Trump to announce the United States’ withdrawal from the pacts in 2017 and 2018, respectively.<sup>7</sup>



### When in history has Congress declared war?

**The Role of International Organizations.** With both the legislative and executive branches assuming a role in foreign policymaking, the navigation of foreign affairs is a complicated undertaking. Complicating matters even further is the fact that the United States operates in a global community of 195 sovereign states, each with its own national priorities, concerns, and values.<sup>8</sup>

To foster international cooperation, the United States and other nations have formed and joined various international organizations, including several that were created to help rebuild after World War II. The United States is the headquarters of the United Nations (UN), which was founded in 1945 to enable dialogue, host negotiations, and forge agreements on security, human rights, environmental protection, and other issues between member nations.<sup>9</sup> The

United States is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, through which it works with China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and ten non-permanent members to maintain international peace.<sup>10</sup> To fund UN operations, the 193 member states make mandatory and voluntary contributions to UN missions and initiatives. The United States pays approximately 22 percent of the UN's regular budget and 28 percent of the peacekeeping budget—shares that are determined by both the size of the economy and per capita income.<sup>11</sup>



### What does the United Nations do?

Other important international organizations include the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is based in the United States and encompasses 189 member states that work to promote international trade, financial stability, economic growth, and global monetary cooperation.<sup>12</sup> The United States is also a member of international alliances and collective defense agreements such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a group of 29 nations that works to promote democratic values and preserve the security of the members by political and military means.<sup>13</sup>

## THE COMPETING INTERESTS OF FOREIGN POLICY



In many ways, foreign policy revolves around the idea of national interests—the things that countries want or need to exist and to improve their circumstances. Just as individuals make decisions by balancing their self-interests and values, nations operate in the global community according to their national interests and values. Most national interests fit into one (or more) of three categories: economic, ideological, and security interests.

**Economic Interests.** Economic interests relate to trade, contracts, taxes, tariffs, and monetary policy. A government may act on behalf of its economic interests by forging free trade agreements that reduce or eliminate trade barriers, imposing tariffs on imports to boost domestic industries, subsidizing certain domestic industries, or working to make sure that exports make it to market in other countries.

The pursuit of economic interests is complicated by the fact that governments in other countries exercise varying degrees of control over their respective economies. In China, for example, the government controls most aspects of the planned economy, including the valuation of currency. In Europe, many nations have mixed economies, in which the government has some control over health care, banking, air travel, and other sizable industries, but much of the economy remains uncontrolled. In the United States, most industries are susceptible to free-market forces, although the government has at times moved to protect some domestic industries such as agriculture, finance, and transportation.

**Ideological Interests.** Ideological interests relate to a nation's ideals, its way of life, and its view of the world. Every nation has its own views of the proper form of government, the protection of civil rights, and the role of religion in government and society. A government may act on behalf of its ideological interests by working to promote its ideology abroad or protecting it from foreign interference at home.

Perhaps the most prominent example of a foreign policy driven by ideological interests is the Cold War, a standoff between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union that persisted for nearly half a century. More recently, in the years since the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, advocates of more forceful U.S. intervention in that country have cited the ideological interests of easing a humanitarian crisis and promoting a more democratic system of government.

**Security Interests.** Security interests relate to a nation's ability to protect its citizens and territory from potential and immediate threats. A government may act on behalf of its security interests by establishing military bases, securing borders, or projecting or exercising military power.

The United States, for example, maintains nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories.<sup>14</sup> These bases are intended to protect U.S. national security interests by supporting allies and allowing troops to respond rapidly to threats and crises. But bases abroad also create security concerns, as they provide concrete targets for enemies of the United States. In 1983, for instance, the terrorist group Hezbollah blew up a U.S. Marine Corps compound in Lebanon, killing 241 U.S. personnel.<sup>15</sup>

**A Balance of Interests.** At times, a national interest is easily categorized as economic, ideological, or security-related, but at other times, national interests defy categorization. For example, some Americans point to the Iraq War of 2003–2011 as an intersection of economic, ideological, and security interests. At the time of the invasion, the United States had economic concerns about the effect of regional instability on the global oil supply, ideological concerns about the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and security concerns about whether or not the Hussein regime was stockpiling weapons.

Sometimes, a nation’s economic, ideological, and security interests simply do not align. For example, the United States has an economic interest in trading with China, but Chinese human rights violations run counter to U.S. commitments to individual liberty and due process. The United States also has a security interest in supporting the government of Pakistan, but the extrajudicial actions of that government run counter to U.S. commitments to free speech, free press, and due process.<sup>16</sup> And as the United States considers these conflicts, some citizens and decision-makers will inevitably disagree with their resolutions.

TYPES OF NATIONAL INTERESTS		
<p><b>Economic Interests:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing citizens with an adequate standard of living</li><li>• Ensuring economic development and growth</li><li>• Establishing trade relations with other nations</li><li>• Protecting economic investment abroad and at home</li><li>• Protecting the means and routes of trade</li><li>• Protecting the competitiveness of key domestic industries</li><li>• Maintaining economic power to ensure economic self-determination</li></ul>	<p><b>Ideological Interests:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protecting and/or promoting a just and/or moral way of life</li><li>• Protecting and/or promoting a just and/or moral system of politics, law, and government</li><li>• Protecting and/or promoting a just and/or moral economic system</li><li>• Protecting and/or promoting the cultural and/or religious values of a nation or a people</li><li>• Advancing and protecting a universal concept of freedom, justice, progress, and/or human dignity</li></ul>	<p><b>Security Interests:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protecting national borders</li><li>• Ensuring the safety of citizens from harm by foreign enemies</li><li>• Protecting allies</li><li>• Protecting areas of military importance (supply routes, allies that host military bases, etc.)</li><li>• Protecting bases and sources of national power</li><li>• Preventing foreign intrusions into national territorial regions</li><li>• Maintaining military power and capacity to project power as needed to protect national sovereignty</li><li>• Maintaining knowledge regarding potential threats</li></ul>
<p><b>An Intersection of Interests</b></p> <p>Some national interests defy categorization. The United States commits large amounts of money and energy to protecting international shipping routes to keep the global economy functioning smoothly. The United States has economic interests in doing so, as international trade is a major driver of the U.S. economy. But security and ideological interests are also at work, as this action protects major harbors, ensures the safety of shipping crews, and aligns with the American belief in free trade.</p>		



## THE TOOLS OF FOREIGN POLICY



Once policymakers determine which national interests to prioritize, they must choose from an array of available tools to craft foreign policy. Here are five of the most common tools of foreign policy:

- **Diplomacy.** Diplomacy is the act of negotiating or cooperating with other nations to achieve objectives. Diplomacy can involve short-term cooperation in response to a crisis or long-term agreements and treaties.
- **Foreign Aid.** Foreign aid is the act of giving money, loans, food, medicine, weapons, or military equipment and technology to another nation. Nations exchange various types of foreign aid to help build partnerships, promote stability and security, and help one another in times of crisis; they also withhold foreign aid when attempting to change the behavior of other nations. Approximately one percent of the United States' annual budget goes toward foreign aid programs, which include initiatives to improve public health, spur economic development, bolster humanitarian assistance, and aid democratic elections.<sup>17</sup>



### How does the United States invest in countries around the world?

- **Trade Relations.** The trade of goods and services affects every nation. Therefore, trade policy can be a powerful tool to influence the behavior of other nations. Free trade agreements can lead to closer cooperation between nations, while tariffs can weaken national economies by eliminating markets for exports. Nations can also use sanctions to block trade, thus harming the economy of a country and forcing its government to change course.
- **Military Intervention.** Often considered a last resort, foreign military intervention can assume many forms. When responding to a foreign threat, a nation may declare war, deploy troops in a large-scale combat mission, initiate targeted air strikes, deploy special forces, or send naval vessels to a specific region of the world.
- **Deterrence.** Deterrence is a strategy of threatening action against another nation. The threat of military intervention or economic sanctions is often enough to persuade a country to follow a particular course of action. The most prominent example of deterrence is the Cold War policy of mutually assured destruction—the idea that the use of nuclear weapons by either the United States or the Soviet Union would result in the destruction of both sides.

## THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD



The United States has been a dominant force in global politics since the end of World War II. As the war came to an end, the international community looked for a stabilizing force—a role that only the United States was able to fill at the time. In 1944, a group of representatives from 44 nations gathered in New Hampshire to establish the Bretton Woods system, an agreement that tied other currencies to the U.S. dollar, aiming to free international trade and fund postwar reconstruction.<sup>18</sup>

This brief era of international cooperation darkened with the onset of the Cold War, a nearly half-century-long conflict between a capitalist bloc led by the United States and a communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. The two blocs engaged in a power struggle between East and West for several decades, with each side seeking to spread its ideology and bolster its economy. The standoff saw times of war, as in Korea and Vietnam, and threats of war, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. But much of the battle took place in the field of nuclear technology and in the secret world of covert agencies. In the end, the Cold War never became the outright global war that many had feared, and the Soviet Union collapsed as its satellite states pushed for independence.

As the Cold War came to an end, the United States was once again perceived as the only true superpower, an image it reinforced with a resounding victory in the Gulf War of 1990–1991. And although the 1990s saw several acts of terrorism committed against U.S. personnel abroad—including the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998—it was a time of relative peace for the United States.

That peace was shattered on September 11, 2001, when 19 terrorists from the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial airliners and killed 2,977 people in the deadliest act of terrorism in U.S. history.<sup>19</sup> Within months, the United States invaded Afghanistan to dismantle the Taliban, a group of Islamic fundamentalist warlords who supported and sheltered al-Qaeda. Since that time, the United States has been significantly more active abroad than at any time since the end of the Cold War. U.S. troops invaded Iraq in 2003 amid concerns that the Hussein regime may have possessed weapons of mass destruction; that war that officially came to an end in 2011.<sup>20</sup>

Since 2003, U.S. efforts to combat terrorism have changed. U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen have significantly weakened al-Qaeda, but newer terrorist organizations in Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and other nations have risen in its place. The most prominent among them is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the terrorist group also known as Islamic State or ISIL. In recent years, ISIS has worked to create instability in Iraq, engage in the Syrian civil war, and inspire and execute terrorist attacks in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

For the most part, the foreign policies of President Obama placed greater emphasis on cooperation with other nations. During the 2011 Libyan civil war, which removed the dictator Moammar Gaddafi from power, the United States joined in assisting anti-Gaddafi forces but allowed rebel groups and European nations to take the lead. For his part, President Trump has promised to enact a foreign policy that avoids entangling treaties and puts the needs of the United States first.

## THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY



### Should the United States downsize its role in global affairs?

There are many competing visions for the role that the United States should assume on the global stage. Since the end of the Cold War, some policymakers have supported the idea of the United States as the “indispensable nation”—a term that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright first used in 1998.<sup>21</sup> “Only the United States had the power to guarantee global security,” wrote Sidney Blumenthal, the journalist who coined the term. “Without our presence or support, multilateral endeavors would fail.”<sup>22</sup>

But not all policymakers share this vision. On his first day in office, President Trump vowed to follow a different course. “For many decades, we’ve enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; subsidized the armies of other countries, while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We’ve defended other nations’ borders while refusing to defend our own,” President Trump said in his inaugural address. “From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it’s going to be only America first, America first.”<sup>23</sup>



President Donald Trump delivers his inaugural address, pledging to put “America first”



Then-Secretary of State John Kerry argues that the United States cannot retreat from the world stage



## SHOULD THE UNITED STATES DOWNSIZE ITS ROLE IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS?



**YES: The United States cannot afford to be the world's police force.**

"No country has ever prospered that failed to put its own interests first," President Trump said in April 2016, then a candidate for president. "Both our friends and our enemies put their countries above ours and we, while being fair to them, must start doing the same. We will no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism."<sup>24</sup>

Ever since World War II, the United States has been a global leader. Americans have helped to enforce treaties, ensure the availability and safety of shipping lanes, and settle disputes between faraway nations. But Americans can no longer afford to shoulder this burden, and other countries must step up to do their part.

"In the 1940s, we saved the world. The Greatest Generation beat back the Nazis and Japanese imperialists. Then we saved the world again. This time, from totalitarianism and communism," said President Trump. "Unfortunately, after the Cold War, our foreign policy veered badly off course. We failed to develop a new vision for a new time. ... Logic was replaced with foolishness and arrogance, which led to one foreign policy disaster after another."<sup>25</sup>

This is why President Trump has disentangled the United States from unfair multinational pacts, such as the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris Agreement. It is why he announced in December 2018 that the United States would withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan and Syria. And it is why he has said that the United States should scale down its commitments to NATO and other international organizations, claiming that Americans pay a "disproportionate share."<sup>26</sup>

President Trump is not the first political figure to question the United States' role in NATO. In 2011, former President George W. Bush said that there is a growing divide "between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burden of commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership but don't want to share the risks and costs."<sup>27</sup> But now, President Trump is seeing some success. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, President Trump's leadership and pressure have helped persuade NATO allies to add \$100 billion to their defense budgets by the end of 2020.<sup>28</sup>

In the end, a majority of Americans agree that downsizing the nation's role in global affairs is the right course of action. In a 2013 poll, 52 percent of respondents told the Pew Research Center that the United States should be "minding its own business."<sup>29</sup> Americans have too many problems at home—including more than \$22 trillion in national debt—to continue to play the role of global sheriff.<sup>30</sup>



**NO: The United States plays a vital role in promoting democracy and maintaining global security.**

"For 70 years, we sustained an international system of open commerce and democratic alliances that has enabled America and the West to grow and thrive," the late syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote. "Global leadership is what made America great. We abandon it at our peril."<sup>31</sup>

For most of the 20th and 21st centuries, the United States has been a leader on the international stage. The U.S. Navy keeps sea lanes open for trade, allowing the global economy to function and thrive. U.S. military bases ensure the safety and security of civilians around the world. And the U.S. government provides vital economic, humanitarian, and military aid to foreign countries in times of crisis.

"Some claim that putting America first is a reassertion of American exceptionalism," Krauthammer wrote. "On the contrary, it is the antithesis. It makes America no different from all the other countries that define themselves by a particularist blood-and-soil nationalism. What made America exceptional, unique in the world, was defining its own national interest beyond its narrow economic and security needs to encompass the safety and prosperity of a vast array of allies."<sup>32</sup>

If the United States downsizes its role in global affairs, it will leave a tremendous void that no other country or international organization is equipped to fill. "There is simply no guarantee that whoever might fill our space would have the capacity, the inclination, or will to keep the world safe, markets open, and people free," wrote former Senators Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn. "If anything, an increasingly brazen China, revanchist Russia, volatile North Korea, and ruthless [ISIS] collectively underscore the need for more, not less, American leadership abroad."<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it is imperative that the United States continue to be the indispensable nation, because there is much work to be done. "Yes, our friends need to contribute their fair share," said former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. "The real debate here is whether we keep these alliances strong or cut them off. ... We need to embrace all the tools of American power, especially diplomacy and development, to be on the frontlines solving problems before they threaten us at home."<sup>34</sup>

There is already enough instability and insecurity in the world. The United States must be at the table—and leading the discussion—when deciding how to address the turmoil in the Middle East, the increasing tensions in Asia, and the continued threat of global terrorism. The United States must not shrink from its responsibilities as a world leader.



# CONCLUSION



As government officials continue to engage in the complex process of foreign policymaking, Americans must make a choice. Should the United States continue its role as an active and engaged leader in global affairs? Or should it focus on fixing problems at home while demanding more of its allies abroad? It is a choice that will have far-reaching consequences for the economy, the military, and the United States' relationships in the international community.

# ENDNOTES



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