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DEALING WITH OTHER NATIONS



NATO Fighters Enforcing the No-fly Zone over Libya

Overview

American government is responsible for establishing and implementing policies that affect the lives of its citizens both nationally and internationally. **Domestic policy** includes programs and laws directly related to activities within the borders of the United States. **Foreign policy**, on the other hand, covers issues connected to other countries and to American citizens traveling or living abroad. In recent decades, globalization and the War on Terror have elevated the importance of cooperation among nations. World events now require a careful analysis of foreign actions and reactions. Let's examine the goals and processes of American foreign policy.

Foreign Policy Objectives: The Big Picture

In today's global society, the actions taken by the United States in foreign affairs have far-reaching effects. They also cover a wide range of topics, including trade, participation in international organizations and military responses. Throughout America's history, several long-term objectives have influenced decisions concerning foreign policy.



- **Protecting America and its Citizens:** The most important goal of any country's foreign policy is **national security**. This involves the development of military forces for defense and negotiations with other nations to avoid dangerous situations. Americans need to protect themselves from foreign invasion and to travel abroad with a certain degree of safety. The United States also places a priority on creating an international business climate that encourages trade and commerce.
- **Encouraging Trade:** It is important that U.S. foreign policy maintain worldwide conditions favorable for trade. The United States relies heavily on the importation of oil, precious metals and raw materials necessary for industry. The income generated from exporting food, manufactured goods and technology is a valuable asset to the American economy.
- **Promoting World Peace:** The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers following World War II dominated foreign policy decisions for most of the remainder of the twentieth century. During the Cold War, both countries formed alliances to maintain a balance of power and to prevent war. The development of the atomic bomb encouraged an arms race and attempts to gain military advantage. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought an end to the Cold War and changes in foreign policy. As part of the War on Terror, the United States continues to stress the importance of controlling nuclear weapons, working with multi-national organizations and using diplomatic tactics to ensure world peace.



- **Supporting Democracy:** Since its origin, the United States has tried to promote human rights and democracy throughout the world. Some countries have been provided with economic aid and military assistance to protect these ideals. American troops have also been sent to defend countries from invasions and revolutions. The U.S. government has also withheld aid from nations when they have abused human rights.
- **Providing Humanitarian Aid:** Another goal of American foreign policy is to provide humanitarian aid in response to critical situations. Government agencies and private groups send disaster relief around the world to the victims of catastrophes, such as earthquakes and famines.



Go to Questions 1 through 6.

Who Makes Foreign Policy?

The executive branch of the federal government bears most of the responsibility for creating and carrying out foreign policy. Presidents and their representatives meet with other world leaders to resolve conflicts before they require military settlement and to improve relations. While working toward these goals, the President relies on specific departments within the Cabinet and a number of executive agencies.

The **Secretary of State** is customarily the President's chief foreign policy advisor and the coordinator of those actions which affect other countries. He or she supervises the **Foreign Service** consisting of ambassadors and other official representatives in over 160 nations. State Department personnel establish embassies in nations recognized by the United States and provide an American presence abroad. They offer valuable insights into the culture, customs and public opinions of the regions in which they work. The chart below shows the major bureaus and positions within the State Department.

Inside the Department of State	
Secretary of State	The Secretary of State oversees the department, serves as the President's chief foreign policy advisor, meets with heads of foreign nations and is a member of the National Security Council.
Undersecretary of Economic Affairs	The Undersecretary of Economic Affairs carries out economic policy relating to trade and international monetary issues. This official also establishes economic relationships with developing countries.
Regional Bureaus	Five regional offices direct foreign policy in major geographic areas of the world: European and Canadian Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, African Affairs and Inter-American Affairs.
Bureau of Consular Affairs	This office is responsible for American interests and citizens abroad. It also issues passports, visas and other documents relating to immigration and travel.
Bureau of Intelligence and Research	The bureau collects and analyzes information that assists in determining and executing foreign policy.
Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs	This office focuses on foreign policy relating to security and military assistance. This includes directing discussions with other countries on arms control and nuclear weapons.
Bureau of Public Affairs	This part of the organization supervises the information made available to the American public through press conferences, media appearances and briefings. It also provides statistics reflecting public opinion.
Foreign Service	The Foreign Service division maintains embassies, consulates and other offices that represent the U.S. government throughout the world. Its officials conduct U.S. affairs in foreign nations and keep the President informed of developments in the countries to which they are assigned.
Office of Chief Protocol	This bureau coordinates visits with foreign dignitaries and conducts ceremonial events. Its employees advise the U.S. government on customs, diplomatic procedure and international law as they apply to the country where they are stationed.

The **Department of Defense** is responsible for national security and plays a significant role in determining U.S. foreign policy. Headquartered in Arlington, Virginia at the **Pentagon**, this division of the executive branch employs two million military personnel and one million civilians. Although the President is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the Secretary of Defense directs the operations of this department. He also advises the President on military matters and, according to federal law, must be a civilian rather than a soldier. A five-member team, known as the **Joint Chiefs of Staff**, is also part of the Department of Defense. This group updates the President on advancements in weapons technology and assesses the strength of the armed forces. The **National Security Agency**, also under the jurisdiction of the Defense Department, provides policy-makers with information pertinent to the protection of the United States by collecting, translating, decoding and analyzing data. Because it is authorized to accomplish this mission with the use of undetected devices and software, the National Security Agency's surveillance methods are often criticized.



National Security Agency Headquarters

The **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)**, classified as an executive agency, is another source of valuable information and contributes to shaping foreign policy. To gain insights and to help maintain national security, its agents conduct covert operations that utilize electronic eavesdropping, spy satellites and other undercover options. They also monitor foreign media outlets, study documents issued by other countries and confer with experts on a wide variety of topics. Because so much of their work is secretive, the activities of the CIA are frequently a source of controversy and create conflict between the executive and legislative branches.

Because of the huge amount of information to consider when making foreign policy decisions, the Office of the President includes the **National Security Council**, put in place by President Truman, and the National Security Staff, formed by President Obama. These groups are made up of select Cabinet secretaries, such as the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, and various presidential advisors. They review material collected by the CIA, the National Security Agency and other sources and suggest courses of action to the President based on their findings.



President Obama Meeting with the National Security Council

The other branches of the federal government also exercise some authority in the formation of foreign policy and check the power of the President. The Constitution gives the Senate the power to ratify treaties and to approve presidential appointments, including ambassadors, Cabinet posts and the director of the CIA. The funds to enforce the President's foreign policy decisions must be appropriated by the House and the Senate. Both houses of Congress maintain committees that investigate the U.S. response to world events and review the need for military intervention. The Supreme Court plays a role by considering the constitutionality of foreign policy and interprets international law when it conflicts with American law.

Beyond the federal government, a number of other groups impact foreign policy. State and local officials also have a stake in the direction of foreign policy. States, cities and even counties sometimes send representatives to foreign nations to discuss investments and trade. They establish foreign offices with the hope of improving cultural relations and the business climate. Like interest groups, states and cities employ lobbyists to promote decisions that are favorable to their objectives. The media, too, is a powerful force in creating public perceptions that influence foreign policy.

The Iran-contra Affair

Some Americans believe that groups within the Office of the President, such as the National Security Council and the State Department, have too much power and are not adequately controlled by the system of check and balances. This criticism came into national focus in 1986 with the uncovering of the **Iran-contra affair**. The public became aware that the National Security Council had agreed to sell weapons to the Iranian government in exchange for the release of American hostages kidnapped by terrorists connected to Iran. Because President Reagan had often stated that he would never bargain with terrorists, the secret sale was very embarrassing to his administration. To make matters worse, the money obtained from the sale has been sent to the fund the contras, a group of Nicaraguan revolutionaries, without the knowledge of Congress or the American public. The National Security Council was well aware that this type of foreign aid is prohibited by Congress. Congress quickly began its own investigation and held a number of lengthy hearings. It concluded that the CIA, the State Department, the Justice Department and the National Security Council had all acted inappropriately and had conspired to cover up illegal activity. The scandal resulted in new rules concerning covert operations and the President's obligation to keep Congress closely informed.



Go to Questions 7 through 16.

Foreign Policy Tools

As with economic policy, foreign policy has various tools to deal effectively with other nations. These tactics range from diplomatic procedures, which stress the formation of working relationships, to military force, an option exercised when all other methods fail.



- **Diplomacy:** In terms foreign policy, diplomacy is the process of negotiating agreements through the establishment of good, working relationships and productive discussions. The ultimate goal is to achieve a win-win for all the nations involved and to encourage countries to view the United States in a positive way. Although on-on-one meetings between the President and foreign heads of state frequently make the news, much of this work is conducted through the Foreign Service, a bureau of the State Department. Resolving disputes in this manner can be a slow process and requires a thorough knowledge of **protocol**, a term that refers to the customs and procedures used by various governments.
- **International Organizations:** Membership in international organizations can be used to help achieve the political, economic and humanitarian goals associated with foreign policy. The United States belongs to the **United Nations** (U.N.) and is a permanent member of its Security Council. Presidents, Secretaries of State and other American representatives have addressed the U.N.'s General Assembly to explain and to clarify positions on a number of issues, such as terrorism and arms control. The United States also participates in the activities conducted by several specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization and the World Food Program. Because a stable world economy is a major concern, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization have gained U.S. support.



Meeting of the U.N. Security Council

- **Foreign Aid:** The United States maintains good relations with other countries by providing assistance through foreign aid. This comes in many forms, including technical advice, low-cost loans, food, medical supplies and equipment for farms and industries. Most foreign aid dollars are actually spent in the United States where they pay for American products and services that are

shipped overseas. The **Peace Corps** and other volunteer organizations also represent a form of foreign aid. Through their work, these groups have improved the standards of living in many countries and have enhanced America's image abroad.

- **Sanctions:** Just as foreign aid can be used to strengthen relations between countries, **sanctions** can be enacted to express disapproval of certain programs or policies. The government may refuse to sell specific products to another country or deny foreign aid. Another common type of economic sanction is an **embargo**. This tactic applies pressure by prohibiting ships of designated countries from entering American ports. An embargo can also be used to prevent entire shipments of U.S. products to certain nations. Although they are peaceful and non-military measures, economic sanctions often deepen resentment toward the United States and deprive civilian populations of medicine or food. Political sanctions are sometimes levied in the form of a **boycott** or a decision not to participate in an international event. For example, the American athletes did not attend the summer Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980 to protest the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. In a similar manner, the Soviet Union chose to boycott the Los Angeles Olympic Games in the summer of 1984.
- **Collective Security:** Collective security pursues foreign policy goals by attempting to maintain the balance of power throughout the world with agreements, alliances and coalitions. Nations pledge to come to each other's defense if attacked and to regard a threat to one country as a threat to all those in the group. The United States has joined almost fifty of these pacts, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization of American States (OAS). The agreements usually commit the U.S. to send military support if the other country is attacked. It also grants the United States permission to establish military bases in that country.



U.S. Troops in Afghanistan

- **Military Force:** For most nations, military force is the last resort in accomplishing foreign policy goals. It requires careful analysis and extensive planning. Policy-makers must consider the probability of success and the risk to American lives before sending U.S. troops into combat. There is always a danger that a minor incident may escalate into a major war and result in the deployment of nuclear weapons.



Go to Questions 17-20.

What's Next?

Although much of the responsibility for developing foreign policy remains with the executive branch, all branches and levels of government contribute to its formation. Political parties, interest groups and the media also play a role in dealing with other nations. The Department of State is a major factor in coordinating foreign policy and provides citizens with a meaningful way to serve their country. To investigate career opportunities in Foreign Service, click on the graphic below.



In the next unit, you will read about the ways that citizens participate in state and local government. Before moving on, review the names and terms in Unit 15; then, complete Questions 21 through 30.



Go to Questions 21 through 30.



Below are additional educational resources and activities for this unit.

[Unit 15 Advance Organizer](#)

[Unit 15 Application Activity](#)