

# Foreign Policy Intro Reading

All government policies come down to one of two areas: domestic and/or foreign.



**Domestic policy** has to do with affairs “at home” - inside the United States. Examples of domestic policies include topics such as tax rates, medical regulations, food safety, and education.



**Foreign policy** covers any topic that concerns our relationship with other countries and/or events that take place outside the United States, such as trade agreements with other countries, forming alliances, and waging war. The main goals of our foreign policy include: protecting America/Americans, supporting economic growth, protecting human rights around the world, and increasing support for American values like democracy and freedom. The course we set regarding foreign policy has a major impact on the world.

Article I of the U.S. Constitution grants Congress the authority to pass legislation relating to domestic and foreign policy, while the process of actually implementing and enforcing these policies often falls to the executive branch. Over the course of U.S. history, Congress has used its power to create several executive departments, led by the secretaries that make up the president’s Cabinet, that help develop and carry out domestic and foreign policy.



It is important to understand that foreign policy and domestic policy affect one another. For example, though maintaining a robust military to defend the United States is in our vital interests, commitments abroad might also mean fewer resources and funding for things we would like domestically. Similarly, treaty commitments that impact an area, like the environment, might change the way we conduct domestic policy.

Over time, both domestic and foreign policy change and adapt to suit the needs of the time, as well as the priorities of the current Congress and presidential administration. Whether concerning matters inside our country or abroad, the ultimate purpose of each policy is to advance our national interest—our nation’s economic, military, political, and/or cultural goals and ambitions.



However, there’s an additional dimension to our domestic and foreign policy: the policies of other nations. The choices that other countries make can have significant effects on the United States and its citizens. There is an interconnectedness of the world’s nations that U.S. policymakers can never ignore.



One of the largest impacts that policies of other nations have on U.S. policy and society is in the area of the economy. The global economy is highly interconnected, with resources and goods shipped and traded all over the world. Trade agreements, tariffs, and currency exchange rates are just a few examples of how economic policies abroad can affect American businesses, jobs, and the prices of goods and services. Changes in foreign nations’

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economic policies can lead to adjustments in U.S. trade policies and regulations to protect or advance American economic interests.

Another way the policies of other nations impact the United States pertains to U.S. national security. The foreign policies and actions of other nations may directly affect the national security of the United States or our allies. When this happens, it may necessitate U.S. military involvement or diplomatic efforts. Commitments to our allies, such as NATO, can obligate the U.S. to commit our money, resources, and soldiers to respond to security crises elsewhere in the world.



Lastly, as a leader and partner in the international community, the United States is often a part of international agreements and conventions. The outcomes of these instances of international cooperation often play a role in shaping U.S. laws and regulations. This in turn will impact domestic policy as well often in areas such as human rights, environmental protection, and trade. Likewise, global challenges such as climate change, emerging pandemics, and the status of refugees require international cooperation to effectively solve, and can require adjustments to U.S. policies to honor the commitments we make. For instance, agreements like the Paris Climate Accord (2015) have influenced U.S. policy decisions, environmental standards, and legislation.

While the foreign and domestic policies of the United States have a major influence on the world, it's critical to understand that this is a two-way street. In our highly connected world, policies set by foreign countries exert a major influence on the economic and security realities of the United States. Navigating these realities is an important factor that our elected leaders must consider when setting our nation's own policies.

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