

## Methods for Pursuing Foreign Policy Goals and Responding to International Conflicts

All government decisions are made in the **national interest** as the current Congress and president see it. National interest refers to a nation's economic, military, political, and/or cultural goals and ambitions. Our national interest may change over time as the balance of Congress shifts between political parties, new presidents take office, and world affairs shift. Throughout history, instances of international conflict have directly or indirectly threatened the national interests of the United States. When pursuing our national interest in the area of foreign policy and responding to international conflicts, Congress and the president have five main methods, or tools, available for use. These five can be used by themselves or combined to achieve the ends we seek.

1. **Foreign Aid:** Aid is used to provide humanitarian assistance to other countries in need. Some examples include but are not limited to: money, soldiers in a peacekeeping role, food, water, medical care, and/or advice and support on how to establish and/or maintain a democratic form of government.
2. **Military Action:** Military action can be taken for the purpose of protecting the nation from attack, or protecting our citizens, vital interests, and/or allies abroad. Military action typically comes through the use of one or more of our seven military branches: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, Coast Guard, and/or National Guard. When military action is used, it may be done with or without a formal declaration of war.
3. **Diplomatic Agreements:** Treaties are formal agreements between countries to end wars or set new international laws, policies, and/or norms. While the president typically negotiates a treaty, the Constitution says that treaties must be ratified by the U.S. Senate. Oftentimes, when accomplishing foreign policy goals, formal treaties will not be used. Instead, presidents, acting in their role as head of state, will simply enter executive agreements with heads of state from other nations. In addition, to pursue its national interest, the United States will often help other disputing nations agree to treaty terms.
4. **Economic Policies:** Economic policies provide the United States opportunities to enter trade agreements that benefit their economy and citizens. Economic tools and policies can also be used to influence international relationships. Historically, the main tools the U.S. uses are sanctions and embargoes. Sanctions are penalties imposed on another country. These usually involve economic issues like trading, tariffs, or restrictions. They can be expanded to travel bans and financial restrictions too. An embargo is a type of sanction placed on trade that bans one country from trading certain items with another. Examples include various sanctions and embargoes between the U.S. and Cuba, Iran, and Syria over the years. By placing these economic restrictions on nations, the U.S. hopes to negatively impact their economy so that they will cease whatever action the U.S. has deemed unacceptable.
5. **Intelligence Gathering:** Gathering intelligence is an imperative piece of foreign policy. Without agencies like the FBI, NSA, and CIA the United States would be incredibly vulnerable to other nations. Espionage is the use of covert individuals to retrieve valuable political or military information from other governments.