

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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U.S. Foreign Policy

Most Americans follow the news reports in the mass media to learn of events in foreign countries. Most Americans also have clothes, audio or TV equipment, and perhaps a car made in another country. Americans all drive or ride in motor vehicles powered by gasoline refined from oil drilled in a foreign country. And a good number of American citizens have fought with the U.S. military in a foreign war. All these things point out ways in which the United States is involved with other countries. They also reflect the United States' foreign policy—the government's plans and decisions that determine how the nation behaves toward other nations.

The president and other **diplomats** of the executive branch manage United States foreign policy. A diplomat is an official who represents his or her country in its dealings with other countries. The secretary of state and secretary of defense are two very high-ranking diplomats in the United States. Many lower-ranking diplomats are on the staffs of their departments.

Economics affects foreign policy. In its business dealings abroad, the United States has a long-standing policy of free trade. Foreign manufacturers may sell their products to U.S. consumers on an equal basis with manufacturers here. Some U.S. businesses have pressured the federal government to set quotas, or yearly limits, on goods entering the country. Others have suggested tariffs, or taxes on such goods. However, government officials usually point out that such policies would only encourage other nations to set their own quotas and tariffs. Then U.S. businesses would have problems selling their goods in foreign countries.

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The United States and International Organizations

There is no “world government.” No authority has the power to force action or policies on an independent nation. Yet modern technology has made nations highly independent. They rely on one another for goods and services and for cooperation in making the world a safe place in which to live. The United States has joined other nations in several organizations designed to accomplish these aims.

In October of 1945, the same year World War II ended, 29 nations signed the charter of the United Nations (UN). Today most of the world's nations belong to the UN. Founders hoped that the UN would maintain world peace through international cooperation. In the 1950s the UN helped end civil wars in several new African nations. Troops from many UN countries, including the United States, fought in Korea. But the UN has had little effect in stopping conflicts and aggressions over the last two decades. Agencies of the United Nations, however, help many poor and developing nations feed their people, improve health conditions, and promote education. While the United States gives much aid directly to many nations, it also contributes large sums of money to UN agencies for their work.

During the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, the United States played a major role in the formation of

several defense treaties. Member nations pledged to help defend one another in case of attack. NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, includes the United States, Canada, and most of the nations of Western Europe. Britain, France, the United States, and several Pacific and Asian nations formed another defense pact known as SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Both NATO and SEATO were formed to defend against communist aggression. The collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe makes their role less vital although NATO played a key role in peacekeeping efforts in the former country of Yugoslavia in the late 1990s.

In the Western Hemisphere, the United States helped create, and still participates in, the Organization of American States (OAS). This group includes most of the countries of Latin America. Its aim is to promote economic development, education, and human rights in Latin America.

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