

Essay and Discussion Questions

Tools of Foreign Policy Higher Education Questions

Help students understand the tools of foreign policy through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

What broad categories of foreign policy tools exist, and what are some examples of approaches that fall within them? Which tools do you think should be used more often? Which less often? Should certain tools have specific restrictions or be entirely off the table? In your response, consider costs, risks, level of coercion required, and the connections among tools that are often used in tandem.

- Which tools are the most expensive? Which are the least expensive?
- Which tools carry the greatest risk? Which tools carry the least risk?
- Which tools are the most coercive? Which are the least coercive?
- Which tools are frequently combined or used in tandem?

Question 2

What is the goal of diplomacy? What are the main forms of diplomacy? Why is it so important for countries to engage in day-to-day diplomacy? What makes negotiations successful? Provide specific recommendations that can promote the conditions for successful negotiations.

- Why is understanding historical context such an important aspect of diplomacy?
- Why is the use of incentives key in negotiations?

Question 3

What are the main economic tools of foreign policy? Why can economic tools be so useful in foreign policy? In your opinion, which economic tool is the most effective and which is the least? Defend your answer with specific examples.

- What are the different types of sanctions? What are the pros and cons of implementing sanctions?
- How can trade advance foreign policy interests?
- What is the Belt and Road Initiative? What are the benefits to China of this initiative? How does it differ from other countries' global engagements? How is it similar?

Question 4

What forms can armed force take? What factors do policymakers consider before using armed force? To what extent are military tools a necessary component of foreign policy? How do they strengthen the effectiveness of other tools?

- Why is deterrence such an important foreign policy tool?
- What are some of the risks associated with pursuing a goal of deterrence?
- How can military force be used to help other countries?
- What are the benefits and challenges related to arms control agreements?
- Why is nation-building so difficult? Over time, has it become more or less likely to succeed?
- What are the challenges for peacekeeping?

Question 5

How do countries select their foreign policy tools? How could using these tools be different for the United States, as compared to other countries? Could some have different costs or risk profiles depending on the country using them? Evaluate which tools are most important to U.S. security and which are the least. Use specific examples that offer evidence of success or failure.

- How have U.S. relations with Japan have changed over the past century?
- How effective were economic tools of foreign policy in shaping modern Japan?
- What strategic advantages does the United States receive from maintaining a close relationship with Japan?
- What are the limits of soft power?

Question 6

What is intelligence, and how is it gathered? What are examples of espionage and spying? Why is intelligence gathering such an important component of foreign policy? Should covert action be considered a legitimate tool of foreign policy? What risks are associated with its use?

- What are some examples of the successful use of covert operations? What are some failures?
- What role will technology play in the future of intelligence?