

Essay and Discussion Questions

U.S. Foreign Policy Higher Education Questions

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

Question 1

Does the president have an appropriate amount of power over foreign policy compared to Congress? Why or why not? If you think this could be improved, how could the Constitution be rewritten to better balance the powers of Congress and the president with regards to foreign policy? Reflect on the role of the Supreme Court in maintaining this balance. Should this role change in any way? If so, how? Explain your argument citing specific examples.

- What powers does the president have? What powers does Congress have? In what areas is the balance of power unclear or contested?
- What is the war powers resolution?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of the division of power between the president and Congress?
- How has the Supreme Court functioned in maintaining the balance of power in government?

Question 2

What are the advantages of the National Security Council (NSC) over previous methods of determining foreign policy? What are the disadvantages? What improvements could be made to the NSC to make it more effective?

- Why was the NSC created? What problems was it meant to solve?
- Who is on the NSC and how does its composition impact security policy?

Question 3

How would you describe the level of influence the United States maintains in global affairs today? Do you predict that this level of influence will decrease or increase in the next 50 years? Consider all factors of U.S. foreign policy including political influence, military influence, humanitarian aid, and soft power.

- How does the intricate network of U.S. alliances impact its foreign policy, especially concerning peace and security? How do these alliances further U.S. foreign policy goals? How do these alliances undermine U.S. foreign policy goals?
- How does the state of the U.S. economy and its currency strengthen the influence of U.S. foreign policy on foreign economies?
- What other countries have international influence and how do these compare to that of the United States?

Question 4

What level of influence do you think outside forces such as social movements, journalism and social media, special groups and lobbies, and think tanks should have on U.S. foreign policymaking? Do you think the U.S. government is too open to outside influence or should the government be more open to outside influence? Why? How should the government change its openness to nongovernmental actors?

- How would outside influence function differently in a country more autocratic than the United States?
- What are ways through which non-governmental actors can uphold or undermine the principles of American democracy?

Question 5

U.S. influence over the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines was seen by some as an exercise of U.S. soft power. How did this help to illustrate the relationship between domestic and foreign policy? In your opinion, what are the most effective forms of soft power the United States can use to further build upon its prestige and attract partners?

- How does soft power differ from hard power?

Question 6

Considering the blurred line between domestic and foreign policy, especially regarding the role of U.S. counterterrorism policies against domestic and international threats, how can actors within the U.S. policy system most effectively confront the United States' most critical threats to national security? Construct your argument citing specific examples and providing recommendations for U.S. domestic and foreign policy actors, as well as drawing examples from countries abroad who share the same threats.

- How do governments encounter challenges in investigating terrorists based on their nation of origin?

Question 7

Comment on the challenges of the treaty-making process and how the U.S. Senate and the president have historically jockeyed for power in this process. Using examples such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, evaluate the effectiveness of treaties compared to executive agreements. Which is more effective and why?

- How are treaties ratified in the United States? And how are they enforced?
- What is an executive agreement? How is it different from a treaty?