

In March 2020, COVID-19 shut down life as we knew it and made a truth about our interconnected world, impossible to ignore:

What goes on outside the United States increasingly affects what happens inside the U.S. Economic changes abroad can create or eliminate U.S. jobs and businesses... and financial problems can jump from Nanjing to New York in the blink of an eye.

When other countries emit greenhouse gases... that heats up the climate for Americans. And just like emissions, viruses ignore borders too... Whether they're passed along by a sneeze or sent with a few keystrokes, threats that begin a world away can -- and increasingly do -- cause chaos in the U.S.

All countries use foreign policy to shape the outside world and protect themselves from threats. But the United States has a unique ability to do so, because of a few distinct characteristics: It has the most powerful military in the world.

The U.S. spends heavily on defense, develops some of the world's most advanced military technologies, and is one of a handful of countries with nuclear weapons.

In addition to its military might, the U.S. economy is the largest in the world. It's home to major international corporations and a center of technological innovation. The United States is also central to international finance, and the U.S. dollar is the most widely used currency in the world.

These attributes boost U.S. foreign policy, increasing its influence on friends and foes.

So while the world shapes what goes on within U.S. borders, the United States similarly shapes the rest of the world, using its foreign policy to advance the country's economic interests, protect it from threats, and try to address tricky global challenges, like pandemics and climate change... or the next challenge just over the horizon.