

## Who's Who

We've looked at what foreign policy is, and we talked about the levers we can pull to make foreign policy happen. But who actually pulls those levers? How do decisions made in Washington, D.C. become actions taken across the world?

The answer depends on what kind of action we're taking. But let's look at it broadly. Many of the actions we take in foreign countries are directed by people in the Executive Branch, which is led by the President. The President has advisors and staff members who collect information on what's going on around the world, give advice about how to respond to it, and divide up the responsibility of acting on those decisions. They also enforce the laws passed by Congress.

Let's say that the United States wants to make a treaty that promotes trade with another country. Who made that decision? The Constitution gives the President the power to propose treaties, and gives Congress the power to turn those treaties into law, but that's not the whole picture.

Before the treaty passes from the President to Congress, it travels up the executive branch. An ambassador who works for the State Department negotiates terms with the other country. Staff and consultants working for the Executive Office evaluate it and make recommendations to the President. The White House Chief of Staff schedules meetings with Congress people to win their support. And finally, the President submits the treaty to Congress, who must give a yes or no vote.

So now a policy is made, but how is it enforced? That depends on what's being done, but let's run through a few examples. Take embargoes and sanctions. Everything that goes in or out of the United States gets checked at the border by the Department of Homeland Security – no sneaking things through! They check with shipping companies to see where cargo shipments are going, where they came from, and whether they have a license to transport that cargo in the first place.

And if someone does sneak something through? The Department of the Treasury is on the case. With help from the US intelligence community (like the CIA), they collect information about financial transactions worldwide. If they detect anyone skirting sanctions, they have the power to freeze their US assets and levy enormous fines. They also keep a list of people who aren't allowed to do business in the United States at all, because yes, you can embargo a person.

And how do we decide who to embargo or sanction? Well, these things are generally proposed in the National Security Council. The NSC brings together the President and all the top military and diplomatic advisors, such as the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. They guide decisions about when and how to take international action.

And since intelligence operations are an important part of foreign policy, the Head of the CIA is also a key member of the National Security Council. The CIA gathers reports from a wide-ranging network of undercover operatives gathering what's called "human intelligence" from in-person interactions, and information analysts who use machine intelligence to find significant information buried in anything from social media to satellite images.

Armed with that information, the Council can make better decisions about how to intervene in foreign affairs. Perhaps the intelligence reports suggest that the new ruler of a traditionally hostile state admires American culture. The Secretary of State can strengthen that relationship by reaching out to

establish humanitarian aid through the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID. Congress funds USAID, and USAID uses those funds to send a mission director to develop a plan to help the country: if people are starving, then the US can deliver food or bring in stronger seeds and fertilizers to boost agriculture, which feeds more people. The mission director reports to the US ambassador in that country, who in turn reports to the State Department. And having a stable presence reinforced by humanitarian aid allows the CIA to extend its intelligence network deeper into the region.

Friendly nations can also be brought further into the fold by offering them an alliance. The best known example is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO is a multi-country political and military alliance that started between twelve countries in 1949 and has been growing ever since. The US counts fellow NATO members among its closest allies, giving them trade privileges and exchanging technologies that aren't usually available to other countries. In exchange, Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty requires all members to come to each other's aid in case of a military attack on their home soil.

But the US forms alliances outside NATO, as well. Congress voted to create a special category of ally called – I kid you not – “major non-NATO allies.” They authorized the President to add these allies by simply notifying Congress in writing. One thirty day waiting period later, and bam – a new ally, with all those special trade and technology privileges. These allies are missing out on the military defense of NATO's Article 5, but since they can now trade military technology with the US Department of Defense, they're at least in a better position to protect themselves.

But if all else fails and war does come, how does it work? The Constitution says that Congress declares war, and the President leads the armed forces. But just like treaties, the reality is a lot more complicated. As Commander-in-Chief, the President can order troops into combat situations, even ones that aren't clearly defined as war. This has been used for everything from secret strike operations – like the 1980 attempted rescue of American hostages from Iran – to ongoing “police actions” like the Korean War, a United Nations authorized effort which lasted for three years.

In 1973, Congress attempted to define the limits of this Presidential power with the War Powers Resolution. It says that the President can send troops into battle for up to 60 days at a time, and has to tell Congress about it within the first 48 hours. Congress can extend that period by voting to approve further military action, which is not necessarily the same thing as a declaration of war. If that sounds confusing, that's because it is: some scholars have challenged whether it's even legal under the Constitution. President Nixon tried (but failed) to veto the resolution as soon as it passed, and every President since has treated it as an unconstitutional attempt by Congress to encroach on the President's leadership of the armed forces.

But so far, it remains on the books: technically in effect, but never enforced, nor challenged in the Supreme Court. So how does war – or at least, “armed conflict” – actually happen?

In the end, it happens the same way as other major foreign policy decisions enacted by the Executive Branch. The President meets with the National Security Council, hears their reports, weighs their suggestions, and makes the order. Then the complicated machine of federal agencies goes into action, dividing broad orders into tasks and subtasks.

We've only brushed the surface, but hopefully you have a better idea now of how foreign policy gets made – and why it matters. Because all of these decisions that ripple out across the world and seem

so impossibly large... they're all made by people like you and me, not perfect, not all-knowing, but trying to find the best way forward in a sea of difficult choices.