

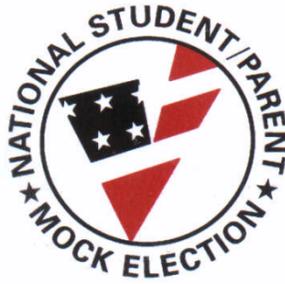


2014 Issues Guide:
Foreign Affairs Issues in the 2014 Elections

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

www.nationalmockelection.org

National Student/Parent Mock Election



Teacher's Guide to Foreign Affairs Issues in the 2014 Elections

Introduction:

This is not a teacher's guide to Foreign Policy 101 -- there are many lesson plans available online. It is also not a guide to specific conflicts in the world today or in the past. Instead, it is intended to examine some foreign affairs issues affecting congressional races in the 2014 elections. While the Constitution puts most control over foreign affairs in the executive branch under the President's direction, unlike many members of Congress he is not up for re-election. However, Congress has budgetary and other authority, and is constantly contesting the President's decisions.

This guide is therefore intended as a starting point for discussions about who is in charge of what, what the roles of the different branches of government should be in our relations with foreign nations, the complications of dealing with groups that are not nations, and how we decide what role the U.S. should play in the world.

Topics for discussion and activities:

In his Farewell Address, President George Washington said: "The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities."

Yet after two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, 9/11, etc., a position of non-intervention or isolationism by the U.S. gets little support. The questions are now how much intervention, for what purpose, where, how, and when; military, economic, or diplomatic; who decides; who pays; ad infinitum.

Can you cite examples of where the U.S. has attempted to create "regime change" or merely assist other governments in advancing democracy or controlling terrorists? How do we decide our objectives? What happens when the President and Congress disagree? How often do members of Congress change their positions for political purposes? Why is that more difficult for the President?

General Wesley Clark reported that in 2001, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's office circulated a paper proposing "taking out" seven countries in five years, including Iraq, Syria, and Iran. (See: http://www.salon.com/2007/10/12/wesley_clark/)

Today, we can add Afghanistan, Somalia, and many more countries where the U.S. has intervened militarily. In 2013, we had Special Operations forces in 134 countries, many for training purposes, but

others actively engaging hostile elements.

Yet President Obama claims to want to use intervention as a last resort, favoring methodical crisis management over rapid reaction. Many members of Congress and candidates for election disagree with him. What are their positions in your state? Are their proposals realistic? Are his? For example, in regard to Ukraine, he said: “Do people actually think that sending some additional arms... could potentially deter the Russian army? Or are we more likely to deter them by applying the sort of pressure, diplomatic and economic, that we’re applying?”

Is the pressure working? What are the alternatives? Who decides the U.S. position – the President or Congress, the Pentagon or the State Department, etc? How did the Founding Fathers create a system to determine this when the US was far from a superpower? What, if anything, should we do to change it?



Article II, Section 1, of the Constitution says: “The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.” Robert F. Turner writes:

“But, to men raised on the writings of John Locke, Montesquieu, and Blackstone, the term “executive power” ... included the general management of the nation’s external intercourse— what Locke described as authority over “war, peace, leagues, and alliances....”

“Thus, when in April 1790 President George Washington asked Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson where the Constitution had vested the details of foreign policy not specifically addressed in the instrument, Jefferson noted that the Constitution had “declared that the Executive powers shall be vested in the President, submitting special articles of it to a negative by the Senate” From this, he reasoned: “The transaction of business with foreign nations is Executive altogether. It belongs, then, to the head of that department, except as to such portions of it as are specially submitted to the Senate. Exceptions are to be construed strictly.”

(See: <http://news.yahoo.com/called-islamic-state-constitution-president-part-one-100210140--politics.html>)

One of those exceptions, the power to declare war, has not been used since 1941. Why not? What Presidential appointments require Senate consent? Another exception is that Congress has the power to raise and support the military, but the President is the Commander in Chief. How does this create conflicts? How are they resolved?

Yet another exception is that the Senate has the power to approve treaties before the President ratifies them. Once ratified, however, it is up to the Executive Branch to implement and enforce them. What happens when members of Congress or candidates don’t like the result? What are the positions of your Congressional candidates on trade agreements, NATO, SEATO, etc.?

To what extent should the U.S. be bound by treaties and international law? Should it participate in the World Court? The United Nations? How are these policies decided? Again, what happens when the President and Congress disagree? Why does the Judicial Branch rarely decide?



In addition to military intervention, the U.S. can assert its influence through foreign aid, trade policies, and various other methods, both overt and secret. How do we decide what constitutes U.S. interests, other than counteracting threats? Much of our foreign policy is aimed toward an uninterrupted flow of imported oil, often from undemocratic countries that violate human rights. Why? Are your Congressional candidates proposing any way to change this? How much influence do we have on countries like Saudi Arabia, and how much do they have on us? The U.S. is also the biggest exporter of military weapons. How should we weigh American jobs and economics against other values like press freedom or universal suffrage?

How have our perceptions of the U.S. role in world affairs changed since Vietnam? What were our objectives then, and how have they changed since the end of the Cold War – or have they? Can the U.S. police the planet? What can we do about situations like the depredations of Boko Haram in Nigeria, for example? When should we act to stop potential genocide? What happens when problems in other countries causes people to attempt to migrate to the U.S. or our allies? Can we be any more effective at being the world's social welfare agency than its police? How are the 2014 candidates proposing we aid other countries – with military assistance, technical support, scholarships, or other means? What is the proper balance, and which countries should get what?

What are the current world problems that are making headlines? Why is the U.S. involved in disputes with countries in the Middle East, Russia, China, and elsewhere? How do we prevent annihilation when our opponents have nuclear arms and neither side will back down? The U.S. is no longer as powerful as it was. Why? Is this a zero-sum game? What nations are gaining power at our expense?

There seems to be a new crisis every week – intelligence leaks, ISIL, etc. What else should we be prepared for? We recently sent 3000 troops to Liberia because of the Ebola outbreak. Why is this a military threat? Why is it our concern if that country, Sierra Leone, and others are destabilized again and return to civil war? What might happen if global climate change causes crop failures and mass starvation? What solutions or preparations are the 2014 candidates proposing?

How do we pay for all this? The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost trillions of dollars; what effect has that had on our society? Do we need to project a tough image, or does it just make us appear to be wild cowboys? Should we try to accomplish our goals ourselves, or insist on multilateral efforts with other countries? We are now fighting forces like ISIL that are not countries – should we expand our allies to include other entities as well, like corporations?

How do we end the domestic discord caused by all the disagreement over how we conduct our foreign affairs? Until the Vietnam War, Congress kept our differences low-key. In 1949, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, a proponent of bipartisanship, said:

“It will be a sad hour for the Republic if we ever desert the fundamental concept that politics shall stop at the water's edge. It will be a triumphant day for those who would divide and conquer us if we abandon the

quest for a united voice when American demands peace with honor in the world. In my view, nothing has happened to absolve either Democrats or Republicans from continuing to put their country first. Those who don't will serve neither their party nor themselves."

(See: <http://news.yahoo.com/called-islamic-state-constitution-president-part-2-100807264--politics.html>)

Do you agree? Do the candidates?

What else has changed the world since then? Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote last August:

"The clash between the international economy and the political institutions that ostensibly govern it also weakens the sense of common purpose necessary for world order. The economic system has become global, while the political structure of the world remains based on the nation-state. Economic globalization, in its essence, ignores national frontiers. Foreign policy affirms them, even as it seeks to reconcile conflicting national aims or ideals of world order."

(See: <http://online.wsj.com/articles/henry-kissinger-on-the-assembly-of-a-new-world-order-1409328075>)

Can we ever achieve "world order?" Should we? What is more important – democracy or order? Global trade or human rights? Economic growth or environmental protection? Influencing the First World or the Third World? What would George Washington think of the state of the world today?

