

GROUPS THAT INFLUENCE FOREIGN POLICY

EVEN THOUGH the executive branch is the most powerful branch of government in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign and military policy, other groups influence and shape American foreign and military policy. We turn now to these other groups: Congress, the military-industrial complex, the news media, and the public.

Congress

The Constitution gave Congress fewer responsibilities in foreign and defense policy than the president, but it often plays a significant role. Most would agree that Congress is the second most important group in shaping American foreign and military affairs.²⁵ Congress influences foreign and defense policy through its congressional leadership; congressional oversight; in its approval of treaties, executive agreements, and appointments; appropriations; and the War Powers Act.

Congressional Leadership. Normally the president proposes a foreign policy and Congress accepts, modifies, or rejects it. However, even though it rarely uses it, Congress has the power to develop and implement policy. For example, when the Soviet Union in 1957 launched *Sputnik*, the world's first artificial satellite, even though President Eisenhower did not consider it a threat to U.S. security, some members of Congress did. Thus, a Senate Armed Services subcommittee held hearings on the threat posed by the Soviet space program. Concluding there was a threat, Congress created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to run a U.S. space program, and the National Defense Education Act to provide funding for science and foreign-language education. Although they were civilian programs, they were closely connected to defense.

Congressional Oversight. Congress oversees foreign and military policy in many ways. We describe below the role of Congress in appointments, appropriations, and the War Powers Act. Congress's other oversight powers include the ability to conduct hearings on foreign and military policy and to have the president and CIA inform congressional committees about covert operations.

From World War II until the late 1960s, Congress deferred to the president and the military on foreign and military issues and rarely exercised its oversight responsibilities outside appropriations. The Vietnam War changed this. As questions emerged about U.S. policy toward Vietnam, Congress questioned executive leadership in other areas of foreign and military policy as well. This more vigorous oversight is now the norm. For example, in 2003 and 2004, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee grilled Bush administration officials and military leaders about setbacks in Iraq and investigated the scandal over the abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

Treaties and Executive Agreements. The Constitution gives the Senate explicit power to approve treaties, but the Senate has rejected treaties only sixteen times in U.S. history. The Senate's power to approve treaties is not inconsequential, however. Presi-

dents want to avoid the embarrassment of Senate rejection of a treaty, the delay of a filibuster, or senatorial refusal to consider a treaty, and they often adjust treaties accordingly. For example, in 1996, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, believed that the Chemical Weapons Convention treaty was unverifiable. Helms therefore kept the Senate from considering ratification until the treaty was modified. In 1997, just before the treaty went into effect internationally, the Senate ratified it. Even so, questions remained, and the necessary implementing legislation was not passed until 1998.

Congress also restrains presidential authority to negotiate treaties. In the case of trade treaties, several presidents have requested that Congress consider these treaties with few amendments so that bargains struck with other countries during negotiations will not come unglued during ratification. This is called fast track legislation. Congress has often agreed to this but has sometimes slowed the process or even refused approval. For example, Congress's opposition to fast track legislation undermined the Clinton administration's effort to expand the North American Free Trade Agreement to include Chile and other countries in the Western Hemisphere. George W. Bush also pushed for fast track authority on trade agreements. Congress was at first unwilling to provide it but finally granted approval in 2002 (see chapter 7).

Presidents can avoid the treaty process by using executive agreements, which unlike treaties do not require Senate ratification. Prior to 1972, the president did not have to inform Congress of the text of these accords. Normally, presidents use executive agreements for routine business matters such as running embassies. The expansion of the U.S. role in world affairs after World War II and the increase in the number of independent countries explains why presidents have used executive agreements more frequently. (Table 8.4 in chapter 8 illustrates this greater use.)

Appointments. Although the Constitution gives the president the power to appoint ambassadors and others involved in foreign and military policy, it gives the Senate the responsibility to provide advice and consent on these appointments. Frequently, important appointees to these foreign and military policy posts have close connections to Congress.

Senators can put a hold on the confirmation process to express concern about issues or a specific appointee. For example, Senator Helms in 1994 used the hold privilege to delay the appointment of Robert Pastor as ambassador to Panama. Helms distrusted Pastor's role in the Carter administration policy toward Nicaragua's formerly Marxist government. Pastor's appointment was never approved. In 1997, William Weld, a former Republican governor of Massachusetts, experienced a similar fate because he supported the medical use of marijuana, a position that Helms opposed. Helms therefore refused to hold hearings on Weld's nomination as ambassador to Mexico, effectively derailing the nomination.

Appropriations. Congress has a key role in shaping foreign and military policy through its power to appropriate funds. Congress can influence when and where the United States fights through its control of the budget. While the power to go to war is shared by the executive and legislative branches of government, the power to appropriate funds belongs to the legislature alone. Congress has been careful about using this power. For example, in 1982, Congress used its appropriation power to limit U.S. involvement in Nicaragua. In 1979, a revolutionary group called the Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua. By 1982, the Sandinistas received aid from Cuba and the Soviet Union, usually siding with the Soviet Union on international issues. The Reagan administration therefore provided military aid to the Contras, a group of Nicaraguans fighting the Sandinistas. Many U.S. citizens opposed funding the Contras. After much debate, Congress voted to cut appropriations to the Contras.

The Contra example also shows how the executive branch's ability to act can limit the impact that congressional control of appropriations may have on the conduct of U.S. foreign and military policy. After Congress cut funding for the Contras, some senior Reagan administration officials felt so strongly about funding the Contras that they

contacted foreign nations to provide funds to purchase weapons for the Contras. In addition, they arranged arms sales to Iran, overcharging Iran for the weapons and using the surplus funds to buy weapons for the Contras.

Sometimes, Congress approves more for foreign and military affairs than the president requests, as occurred during the Clinton administration when Congress sometimes appropriated additional funds for weapons purchases. Thus, Congress in 1999 approved about twice as much as Clinton requested for the fighting in Kosovo, much of the greater amount intended for weapons purchases.²⁶

The War Powers Act. Funding the Contras in Nicaragua was not the first time the executive supported military action against congressional will. Throughout American history, there have been cases where Congress and the executive branch disagreed on U.S. military actions overseas. During the Vietnam War, however, Congress tried to define and limit the president's and the executive branch's ability to engage in military action overseas.

As we have seen, for most of the post-World War II period, Congress acceded to presidential preferences in foreign and military affairs. One example of this was the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which granted the president broad, general authority to conduct military actions in Vietnam but stopped short of declaring war. As support for the war dwindled in the late 1960s, Congress grew frustrated with its inability to influence policy on Vietnam. Thus, in 1973, Congress passed the **War Powers Act** to try to prevent future interventions overseas without specific congressional approval. Under the act, the president can deploy troops overseas for sixty days in peacetime unless Congress gives explicit approval for a longer period. If Congress does not give explicit approval within sixty days, the president then has thirty days to withdraw troops. Under the act, the president could respond to an emergency such as rescuing endangered Americans but could not engage in a prolonged struggle without congressional approval.

The War Powers Act continues to be debated. When first passed, President Nixon vetoed it, but Congress passed it over the veto. Nixon then claimed it was unconstitutional, but he resigned because of the Watergate scandal before his claim could be tested. Subsequent presidents, including George W. Bush, have complied with the War Powers Act without necessarily accepting its constitutionality.

The Military-Industrial Complex

Before World War II, the United States during peacetime maintained a small military force and required few weapons and supplies. After World War II, this changed as the United States became a global superpower with major responsibilities, a large military, and the capability to go to war at a moment's notice. Consequently, a close relationship developed between the Department of Defense and the industries that provided the immense quantities of weapons and supplies. This close relationship also created the danger that the military and defense industries would acquire, because of their shared interests, influence over foreign and military policy.

President Eisenhower, a former general who commanded allied forces during World War II, warned in his 1961 farewell address that the United States had developed a **military-industrial complex** that included the military and defense industries. This complex, Eisenhower feared, could become an increasingly dominant factor in U.S. politics with "potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power."²⁷

The military-industrial complex has potential to acquire power for several reasons. First, it has economic clout. During the Cold War, as much as 7 percent of the U.S. gross national product was spent on defense. Second, it has access to technical expertise and political information. Third, the military and defense industries share many interests. For example, both benefited economically when tensions between the United States and Soviet Union increased. Fourth, personal and professional relationships

War Powers Act

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military-industrial complex

The grouping of the U.S. armed forces and defense industries.

between the military and defense industries are close, with many military officers on retirement going to work for defense industries. Finally, the military and defense industry officials work closely with legislators and their staffs. Planned or unplanned, undue influence can accompany close working relations.

Members of the military-industrial complex affect policy by lobbying Congress for funds, making media appearances, spending appropriated money in different geographical areas of the United States, or influencing public opinion. Whether the military-industrial complex sought power and whether it unduly influenced policy during the Cold War is a matter of debate. In the post-Cold War era, it appears clear that the influence of the military-industrial complex has decreased. It is also clear that the military and defense industries continue to share many similar interests. Eisenhower's words of caution thus retain relevance today.

The News Media

The news media are key participants in foreign and military policy formulation and implementation. Media roles include investigation, agenda setting, and influencing public opinion.

Reporting and Investigation. From World War II to the Vietnam War, the press tended to support the president in foreign and military policy. As a rule, editors assumed that government statements were true and printed them as fact. In the mid-1960s, this changed as U.S. involvement in Vietnam grew and reporters based in Vietnam realized that the daily military briefings at times were untrue. By 1966, many reporters called these briefings "the Five O'Clock Follies." This led many reporters, editors, and publishers to investigate government statements as opposed to accepting them.

Some observers complain that since Vietnam and Watergate, journalists have become too intent on investigating and challenging the government, but others argue that the news media are too willing to accept government positions. For example, the glowing initial reports of the Patriot anti-missile defense system in downing Iraqi SCUD missiles during the 1991 Persian Gulf War proved highly inaccurate. Similarly, in Kosovo in 1999, early reports of a high success rate of air missions against Serbian targets proved wrong. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the media were initially hesitant to criticize U.S. actions in Afghanistan or, for that matter, any aspect of the war on terrorism.

Conversely, the news media have the potential to endanger U.S. military activities as a result of their investigations. For example, when marines went ashore in Somalia in 1991, the press was already there to greet them, illuminating the landing into a hostile environment with bright lights. Fortunately, Somali militia did not fire during the landing. During the early phase of the war against Iraq in 2003, the television reporter Geraldo Rivera was criticized severely and forced to leave Iraq for jeopardizing the security of U.S. forces by describing operational details on the air.²⁸

However, the government also uses the news media to achieve its foreign and military policy goals. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the military provided the media extensive access to marines in landing ships off the shore of Kuwait. The Pentagon hoped that Iraq would monitor the broadcasts and that the news coverage would convince Iraq to keep its best divisions on the Kuwaiti coast, awaiting the marines while the actual attack came far inland. The ruse worked. Iraq monitored the broadcasts and kept its best divisions on the coast, waiting for the landing that never came. The assault far inland went perfectly. The U.S. government had used the media to gain a military advantage.

Agenda Setting. The media also put issues on the foreign policy agenda. For example, the East African famines of the 1980s were known to international aid agencies such as CARE and to government officials, but the famine did not become an issue in



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

■ Pat Tillman was a well-paid Arizona Cardinals football player with a great career ahead of him when he made an abrupt change. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Tillman joined the Army Rangers and served with those forces until killed in action in Afghanistan in 2004.

the United States until television broadcast pictures of the famine. In 2004, journalists learned of the abuse of Iraqi detainees by U.S. soldiers at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison and pursued the story vigorously. Their focus on this issue led to congressional hearings into how such abuse had occurred, and Bush administration denunciations of the abuse. Complex issues such as international trade or third world debt, which take time to explain and offer little opportunity for startling footage, receive less media coverage than stories about war and disasters, even though their overall impact may be greater.

One must not conclude that the media determine policy. The media covered the slaughter in Rwanda, where over a million people died, but the U.S. government did nothing except express outrage. Similarly, despite extensive media coverage, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia went on for two years before the United States responded. Despite extensive coverage of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, nearly half the American population opposed military action the day before bombing began. The media are influential as agenda setters, but they do not determine policy.

Influencing Public Opinion. The media's ability to influence public opinion is closely related to their agenda-setting role. The role of public opinion in creating and implementing policy is discussed in the following section, so here we will briefly examine how the media influence that opinion.

Media coverage of the Vietnam War is a good example of the media's ability to influence public opinion. It is often said that Vietnam was the first TV war, with footage of battles and deaths broadcast into living rooms the same day that they occurred. Most analysts agree that these reports reduced public support for the conflict.

The media can also assist in building public support for a war or for a foreign policy initiative. For example, during the 2001–2002 action in Afghanistan, the U.S. military provided the media carefully controlled access to selected locations. Control was not total, but it was significant and helped maintain popular support for the effort. In the 2003 invasion of Iraq, journalists were imbedded with troops, giving them direct access to the frontlines of the conflict.

The Public

Public opinion also influences U.S. foreign and defense policy. Some scholars argue that public opinion on issues of foreign and defense policy has two dimensions, militarism/nonmilitarism and isolationism/internationalism, creating four opinion groups.²⁹ Others say that a third dimension, unilateralism/multilateralism, is also important. The public is not equally divided among these opinion groups, but foreign and defense policy usually has to appeal across these dimensions to two or more groups to achieve widespread popular support. The presence of these dimensions also means that most foreign or defense policies have a core group of people in opposition.

As a rule, the American public is more interested in domestic affairs than foreign and defense policy (see Figure 19.3). Nevertheless, public opinion is often on the president's mind when creating or implementing foreign or defense policy. Public opinion rarely determines what an administration does, but it often influences the emphasis that an administration places on a foreign or defense initiative. For example, during most of the Reagan

administration, the United States provided military assistance to the right-wing government of El Salvador in its fight against left-wing insurgents. Reagan's advisers believed that emphasizing the anti-communist nature of this assistance would boost Reagan's already high popularity. Much to their surprise, the more they emphasized El Salvador and U.S. involvement there, the more Reagan's popularity went down. Reagan's advisers determined that El Salvador was seen as having the potential to become another Vietnam, so the administration stopped mentioning El Salvador. Reagan's popularity went back up.

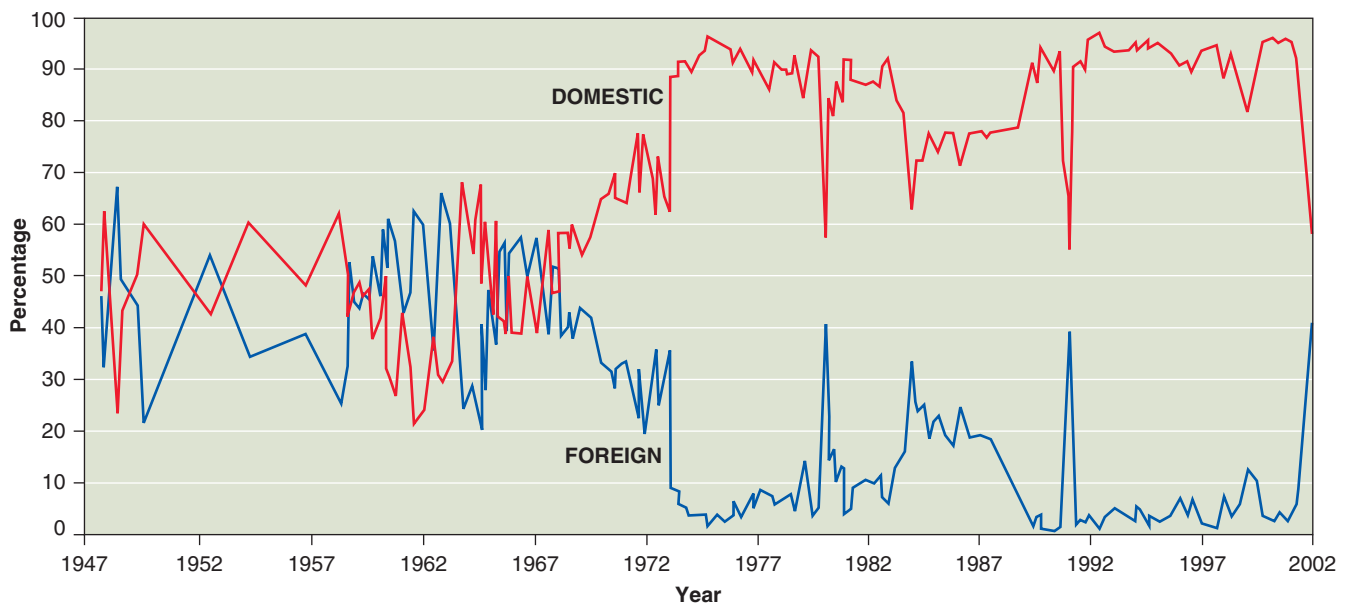
In the United States and other democracies, foreign policy or defense crises generally increase presidential popularity, but sometimes the increase is temporary. President George W. Bush's approval ratings skyrocketed to unprecedented highs in the weeks after the 9/11 disaster, and they remained at high levels during the war in Afghanistan. They fell somewhat at the beginning of the war against Iraq in 2003, then began to recede significantly when the situation in Iraq remained unstable many months after the Hussein government had toppled.

In addition to public opinion, the American public affects foreign and defense policy in elections and through public action.

Elections. In the U.S. system, citizens exercise electoral control on presidential power in only the crudest of ways and only at set intervals: every fourth year during a presidential election. Even then, voters can express their approval or disapproval of an existing policy, but they can send no clear message for an alternative. For example, in 1952, Eisenhower was elected on a vague promise to end the Korean War. With such a vague promise, he was as free to end the war by using nuclear weapons as he was to end it by negotiating a truce. He chose the latter. In a similar vein, Richard M. Nixon won the 1968 election in part because he claimed he had a "secret plan to end the war" in Vietnam.

Public Action. Public action sometimes shapes foreign and defense policy, as in the widespread resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War. Growing public opposition to the war over time made it difficult to draft soldiers and reach the personnel levels that the military desired. Opposition to the draft also helped move the United States toward an all-volunteer military.

FIGURE 19.3 The Most Important Problem: Domestic or Foreign, 1947–2002. ■



Note: Typical question: "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"

Sources: Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, eds., *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2001–2002* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001). Reprinted by permission. Updates from Roper and Gallup Polls.

nongovernmental organization (NGO)

An organization that is not tied to a government.

Political activists also influence U.S. policy, especially when they join or work with international **nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)**, international organizations that have members from several countries who seek a set of objectives but are not formally connected to a government. Amnesty International, for example, monitors human rights violations worldwide and seeks to galvanize world opinion to influence the behaviors of the most offending governments.

Congress, the military-industrial complex, the news media, and the public influence U.S. foreign and defense policy, but only rarely are they as important as the executive branch and president. Combining the roles of head of government and head of state, with access to immense amounts of information and the ability to act, the president is unrivaled in power in foreign and military affairs. It is not surprising that Congress, the military-industrial complex, the news media, and the public look to the president as national leader.