



American History (High School) Lesson 2

The United States in the 21st Century

Lesson 2

Foreign Policy

Key Terms and People

national interest A country's goals and ambitions

Vladimir Putin President of Russia; former agent of the KGB

ISIS Terrorist enemy, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

Boko Haram West African terrorist group centered in Nigeria that is allied with ISIS

Before You Read

In the last lesson you learned about ways that the U.S. government works to keep the public safe from terrorism. In this lesson you will read about foreign policy during the 21st century.

As You Read

Use a chart to take notes on U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century.

THE UNITED STATES AS A WORLD LEADER

Why is U.S. national interest important?

The United States is the most powerful country in the world. While some people respect the United States for its freedom, prosperity, and hope, others resent the country's power and influence.

The guiding force in determining U.S. relationships with other countries is **national interest**. This relates to our goals and ambitions. National interests may be political, such as supporting the growth of democracy in new and developing countries. National interest may also involve military strength.

The United States has great involvement in world affairs through international organizations. For example, the United States is a key member of the United Nations. Since

the UN is a global organization that tries to protect the interests of all nations, its efforts are often against those of the United States. While many Americans support the UN, others want the United States to withdraw from it. In 2000 the UN wrote goals to help solve world problems such as poverty, hunger, and disease. Some countries have made great progress in reaching the goals.

Another organization the United States is involved in is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While its focus is no longer the Soviet Union, it does intervene militarily to end violence and stop terrorists. Places where NATO has played an important role include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and the Middle East. It has also intervened in the civil war raging in Libya and worked to stop pirates attacking ships in Somalia.

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When natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes occur, or when human-made disasters happen, the United States often steps in to provide humanitarian aid. Several organizations deal with global health and AIDS relief around the world. These organizations work to prevent malnutrition, cholera, and other conditions that kill millions of people annually.

The United States also helps other countries when people's human rights are being violated. The country often asks repressive governments to end human rights abuses. For example, it showed disapproval of South Africa's racist apartheid government by imposing travel restrictions.

1. What is one way that the United States demonstrates its commitment to helping people throughout the world?

REGIONAL POLICIES**What is the job of the Department of State?**

The Department of State is concerned with international relations. It has a difficult job trying to keep the peace, protect U.S. international business interests, and support global cooperation. American foreign policies differ from region to region and from country to country.

The United States maintains friendly relations with its close neighbor Canada. Trading and tourism between the countries is beneficial to both countries. Relations with Mexico and some Central American countries, however, are often strained. This is because of the drug trade and the number of

immigrants entering the United States illegally.

In 2015 a major change occurred in U.S. policy toward Cuba. President Obama and Cuban president Castro worked together to reestablish diplomatic relations after a more than 50-year separation.

Relations with Europe and the United States are strong. Many Americans trace part of their heritage to a European country. Also, trade and tourism thrives between Europe and the United States.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations with Russia eased. People hoped that the country would become democratic. However, with the rise to power of **Vladimir Putin**, this has not happened. He has imprisoned potential rivals, suppressed dissent, and stifled democratic reforms. In 2014 Putin sent Russian troops into Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Russia eventually annexed the region. In response to Russia's actions, the United States, the European Union, and several other countries imposed sanctions against Russia. Relations between the United States and Russia became tense.

The People's Republic of China is the most powerful country in East Asia. The U.S. policy toward China is cautious since its Communist government violates basic human rights.

Economically, China has grown. It is the world's largest exporter and holds more of the U.S. public debt than any other entity. The United States also has a huge trade deficit with China, which means we buy much more from the Chinese than they buy from us.

The United States also has a complex relationship with South Korea. U.S. forces remain there to protect it from Communist North Korea. In Southeast Asia, the United States enjoys good

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relations with Communist Vietnam and Indonesia. However, a violent Islamist terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, causes concern.

The United States has positive dealings with India as many American businesses rely on its high-tech industries. But dealings with Pakistan, also in South Asia, are shaky because Pakistan was accused of shielding Taliban fighters and allowing Osama bin Laden to hide in the country.

The Middle East presents the United States with many problems, including wars, terrorism, and lack of trust. With U.S. dependence on the region's oil, the situation remains complicated. Syria has been in the midst of a civil war, causing millions of Syrians to be displaced. Then a new terrorist enemy, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or **ISIS**, came into existence. This group wants to set up a strict new Islamic state ruled by religious authorities. ISIS controls land in northern Iraq, and while the United States supports Iraq's efforts to fight ISIS, distrust of the United States is widespread.

The United States has not had formal diplomatic relations with Iran since the U.S.-supported shah was overthrown in 1979 and an Islamic theocracy began

ruling. In 2015 an agreement was proposed requiring Iran to reduce its nuclear program in exchange for easing punitive sanctions.

Israel and the United States are strongly connected economically, diplomatically, and militarily. U.S. military aid to Israel is high, and Israel has a positive view of the United States. Turkey, too, is an ally.

Africa presents several unique issues for the United States. North African countries Libya and Egypt are dominated by Islamic culture, with both countries experiencing protests in recent years. Struggles for power continue. In West Africa, Islam is also an influence. A terrorist group, **Boko Haram**, is centered in Nigeria but is active in nearby countries. This group is an ally of ISIS, and wants to establish an Islamic state. It is responsible for the kidnapping of 276 primarily Christian schoolgirls that it sold into sexual slavery.

2. How have terrorist groups impacted the Middle East and Africa?

Lesson 2, *continued*

Describe the nature of U.S. foreign policy with each of the first five countries. Then describe problems that exist in the second set of countries. Lastly, choose one country included in the lesson and explain how it does or does not fit in with the national interests of the United States.

Country	Relationship with the United States
1. Mexico	
2. Russia	
3. China	
4. Pakistan	
5. Israel	
Country	Problems
6. Syria	
7. Iraq	
8. Nigeria	
Country	How It Fits/Does Not Fit with the National Interests of the U.S.
9.	