

2020 Model Senate

Background Briefing Paper – The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

March 3rd, 2020 – Temple University

What is the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations?

The **Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (SCFR)**

is one of two congressional bodies responsible for American foreign policy and international relations.

The committee, founded in 1816, has broad responsibilities including the promotion of democracy, human rights, rights for women and children, the environment, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and global health policy among others.¹ The SCFR is one of ten standing committee's in the **Senate**, and is responsible for a number of legislative and oversight tasks. Bills, resolutions and nominations pertaining to foreign policy or international relations must pass the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations before moving on to the full Senate.



UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS

The SCFR is also broken down into seven subcommittees, which allows for compartmentalized discussions on some of the world's most pressing issues and regions. By dividing the world by region and issue, Senators can establish connections with regional interest groups, form lasting relationships with world leaders, and see issues develop over time.² This arrangement allows the Senate to have considerable continuity when dealing with allies and adversaries throughout the world.

What are the Roles and Responsibilities of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations?

The SCFR has several critical roles and responsibilities pertaining to U.S. interests around the world.³ The committee enjoys a '**substantive** role', which gives the committee jurisdiction to write, debate and enforce **legislation** pertaining to international matters. This includes the approval of international treaties, economic and humanitarian assistance, and relations with international organizations like the United Nations and the International Red Cross. In addition to working on legislation, the various subcommittees will often write and vote on **resolutions**, which are used to state Congress' official stance on a given issue, or to raise an international issue to prominence.

In addition, the committee is also responsible for the approval of various diplomatic posts and U.S. representatives to trade organizations and other international organizations. This responsibility, called the **advice and consent clause**, gives the SCFR significant power over the confirmation of U.S. diplomatic

¹ [Senate Committee on Foreign Relations - History and Rules](#)

² Senators are elected to six-year terms (no term limits), while the president is elected to four-year terms (two-term limited) and members of the House of Representatives are elected to two year terms (no term limits).

³ [Membership and Jurisdiction of Subcommittees – Senate Committee on Foreign Relations](#)



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL of Philadelphia

representatives. This includes jurisdiction over the nominations of ambassadors, the U.S. representative to the United Nations and other top diplomatic posts. As part of the legislative branch of the United States government, the SCFR's also takes on the critical role of **oversight**. This includes periodic and ongoing reviews of "the application, administration and execution of those laws under its jurisdiction".⁴ The SCFR is tasked with ensuring that all American representatives to foreign nations and international organizations are complying with relevant laws and fulfilling their duties.

Congress vs. the Executive – Who has Jurisdiction over Foreign Policy?

Foreign policy and international relations sit in a complex position within the federal government, with responsibilities shared by both Congress and the Executive branch. Congress holds key responsibilities, such as its constitutional prerogative to declare war, while the President is afforded broad ability to negotiate with foreign leaders, set the international agenda and command U.S. foreign policy. The executive will use leaders within the U.S. Department of State or other executive departments to carry out his or her broad vision for foreign relations and negotiate the details of trade agreements or treaties. Often, both parties in Congress will defer to the Executive branch on matters of international affairs in order to provide a united stance toward other nations.

However, the current power sharing relationship between the Executive and Congress has not always existed. Following the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War, Congress ceded significant power to the office of the President. This change was assisted by fundamental shifts in the global environment, including the rise of the nuclear bomb, and the growth of non-state terror groups.⁵ This issue has grown in prominence since the events of September 11th, 2001 and the resulting 'War on Terrorism' and conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In recent years, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has taken a greater interest in Congress' constitutional responsibility for oversight. However, jurisdiction on certain topics remains a complex issue for the both the SCFR and the executive branch.



Who is on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations?

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is currently comprised of 22 senators, 12 from the **majority** Republican Party and 10 from the **minority** Democratic Party. The full committee leadership includes the **chairman**, Senator Jim Risch of Idaho, and the **ranking member**, Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey.

⁴ [Membership and Jurisdiction of Subcommittees – Senate Committee on Foreign Relations](#) (p.1-2)

⁵ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/about/history/>



Each of the seven subcommittees also contain a chairman from the majority party, and a ranking member from the minority party. Each subcommittee is comprised of five Republicans and four Democrats, meaning that Republicans control each subcommittee, the larger SCFR and the full Senate. There is only one female senator on the SCFR, Democrat Jeanne Shaheen from the state of New Hampshire.

Full list of Senators in the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations:

Majority	Minority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Risch, Idaho, <i>Chairman</i> • Marco Rubio, Florida • Ron Johnson, Wisconsin • Cory Gardner, Colorado • Todd Young, Indiana • John Barrasso, Wyoming • Johnny Isakson, Georgia • Rob Portman, Ohio • Rand Paul, Kentucky • Lindsey Graham, South Carolina • Mitt Romney, Utah • Ted Cruz, Texas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob Menendez, New Jersey, <i>Ranking Member</i> • Ben Cardin, Maryland • Jeanne Shaheen, New Hampshire • Chris Coons, Delaware • Tom Udall, New Mexico • Chris Murphy, Connecticut • Tim Kaine, Virginia • Ed Markey, Massachusetts • Jeff Merkley, Oregon • Cory Booker, New Jersey

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations is rather unique its commitment to a bipartisan spirit and respect. Due to its importance combatting threats during the Cold War, and its nature as a foreign-facing committee, Senators from both parties welcome friendlier debate, and go to great lengths to promote bipartisanship and unity. Even in the increasingly polarized nature of modern politics, the SCFR has shown a commitment to mutual respect across party lines.

What are the Seven Subcommittees of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?

Subcommittees allow Senators to focus their efforts on specific issues, regions and topics of importance. The Chair of each subcommittee has broad **jurisdiction** over the scope, focus and actions of their subcommittee. Chairs and ranking members have the authority to call hearings and request **testimony of expert witnesses** and pursue the issues of their choice. Senators then use the witness’s testimony to craft legislation or resolutions aimed at solving ongoing global issues. The legislation and/or resolutions must pass a majority vote in the subcommittee before being presented to the larger Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Ultimately the Chair controls the pace and priorities of each committee, and thus wields significant power in shaping debate. Due to the bipartisan nature of the SCFR, chairs and ranking members often work amicably on establishing an agenda that meets the demands of both parties. Over time, the subcommittees have changed name, form, and focus, given the shifting challenges facing the global community and the objectives of the party who holds majority control.



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL of Philadelphia

The seven subcommittees of the SFRC are: **(1) Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's Issues;** **(2) Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation;** **(3) Subcommittee on East Asia, The Pacific and International Cybersecurity Policy;** **(4) Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism;** **(5) Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy;** **(6) Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management, International Operations, and Bilateral International Development;** and **(7) Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy, and Environmental Policy.**

The Model Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

For this program, you will be assigned a specific role, such as a Senator, a Senator's Aide or a Witness, and an assignment to one of three subcommittees. Each subcommittee will investigate one of three substantive issues 1) The Ongoing Political Tensions with Iran; 2) Cybersecurity and Election Independence; 3) Migration in the Western Hemisphere.

The overall goal of each subcommittee is to produce a resolution aimed at aiding, mitigating or solving the issue at hand. Senators will use the subcommittee forum to call expert witnesses for testimony and questioning, in order to provide information and context. The Senators will then take the testimony and craft a resolution, that both solves the issue at hand, and remains committed to advancing U.S interests around the world. Special considerations should be made to alleviate human suffering, advance a **liberal democratic** agenda, and protect and preserve international alliances.

Keeping in mind the overall goal of the subcommittee, your individual goal for this program will depend heavily on you assigned role. Expert Witnesses are tasked with giving accurate, well-research and fact-informed testimony about the issue at hand, as it pertains to your assigned figure. In addition, witnesses attempt to give broad context, perspective and evidence to support a variety of solutions to an issue. The role of Senators and Senator's Aides are to listen, question, deliberate and ultimately craft a comprehensive resolution, given the information provided during research and witness testimony. The role of Journalist is meant to monitor, fact-check and take notes during the hearings. Journalists will ultimately write an article for the World Affairs Council (and school newspaper if applicable) that describes the days events and outcomes.

Questions to Consider

1. In your opinion, which of the three roles (substantive, oversight, advice and consent) is the most important for members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations?

2. What is a resolution? How is it similar or different to legislation?

3. What are the responsibilities of a chairman or chairwoman of one of the seven subcommittees?



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
of Philadelphia

4. Does the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have jurisdiction to declare war? Does the SCFR have the ability to sanction enemies?

5. Why is it important for members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to work in a bipartisan manner? Why is it more important in this committee than other committees in the Senate?

6. What is your assigned role for the Model Senate program? What preparation work is required of you ahead of time? What will you be doing the day of the program? Note: Visit our 'Student Roles and Responsibilities' page at wacphila.org > High School Programs > Model Senate for more info.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Description
Senate	The upper chamber of the United States congress.
Substantive Role	The ability to write laws, treaties, intervention abroad, declaration of war, and other powers of congress.
Legislation	The act of making or enacting laws.
Resolutions	A written motion adopted by a deliberative body.
Advice and Consent Clause	The power of the United States senate to be consulted on and approve treaties signed and appointments by the president of the United States to public positions.
Oversight	Regulatory supervision; Systems or actions to control an activity and make sure it is done correctly and legally.
Majority	The majority party is the party that has the largest number of seats in the entire senate. The majority party is given chairmanship of each committee and is able to set the agenda and debate for the subcommittee, committee or Senate as a whole.
Minority	The minority party is the party that has the next-largest number of seats in the senate.
Chairman	The presiding officer of a committee or subcommittee.
Ranking Member	The highest-ranking member of the minority party.
Jurisdiction	The official power to make legal decisions and judgements.
Testimony of Expert Witnesses	A formal written or spoken statement, especially one given in a court of law, by a witness who is qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education.
Liberal Democracy	A democracy based on the recognition of individual rights and freedoms, in which decisions from direct or representative processes prevail in many policy areas.