

Committee History

Up

Committee on International Relations

Origins and History



The House of Representatives Committee on International Relations traces its origins to November 29, 1775, when the Continental Congress created a committee, by resolution "for the sole purposes of corresponding with our friends of Great Britain, Ireland, and other parts of the world." Chosen for this committee were Benjamin Franklin -- who served as chairman and guiding spirit -- Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Johnson, Jr., John Dickinson, and John Jay. Originally known as the Committee of Correspondence, then as the Committee of Secret Correspondence, it was the first institution created to represent the United States in the foreign affairs field. The House of Representatives Committee on International Relations (as well as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) is a lineal descendant of the Committee of Correspondence. Under Benjamin Franklin's leadership, the committee quickly entered into communication with various persons in Europe for the purpose of ascertaining sentiment there toward the Colonies and obtaining any other information which might be useful in the struggle with England, even designating its own secret agents abroad.

After the Congress of the United States was organized under the Constitution in 1789, select committees to oversee foreign affairs were appointed. In the years before the second World War, congressional foreign affairs was dominated by the Senate by design of the Constitutional Convention. Although the division of powers stipulated Congress should "advise and consent," treaty-making power went to the smaller body in an effort to maintain "secrecy and dispatch." In 1807, during the Jefferson Presidency, a House committee was established in response to predatory actions by both the French and British against American commercial shipping. Following the British search and seizure of the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* miles off the Virginia coast, the House appointed a special Foreign Relations Committee, known as the Aggression Committee. Its findings led President Madison to send a war message to Congress on June 1, 1812, and three days later, the House of Representatives passed the first declaration of war by a vote of 79 to 49. Ten years after the War of 1812, seven inaugural Members of Congress co-founded the Committee on Foreign Affairs, newly designated a standing committee of the House of Representatives.

Though the Executive Branch does take the lead on nearly every aspect of foreign policy, the congressional committees have used their "power of the purse" to exert influence upon the President's agenda. In 1947, after lengthy hearings in the House Foreign Affairs Committee (as the House Committee on International Relations was called after one of several name changes), the Marshall Plan -- the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948 -- was agreed to by a vote of 329 to 74. This support of the Administration's proposal draws a stark comparison to the use of the purse in 1970, to curb the expansion of the geographic region that the U.S. would deploy forces. To end U.S. participation decisively in Vietnam, on August 15, 1973, Congress prohibited the use of funds that would directly, or indirectly, support combat activities in North and South Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia. The Vietnam War encouraged the committee to scrutinize the actions of the Executive Branch more closely, and the role of the House International Relations Committee has, as a result, gained more prestige and earned more respect.

In 1985, the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Dante B. Fascell, coordinated efforts with the Chairman of the House Budget Committee to introduced H.R. 1460, the "Anti-

Apartheid Act of 1985," which was later limited by the Executive Order of President Reagan. Legislation now heralded as having been pivotal to ending the Apartheid government in South Africa can be credited to the Africa Subcommittee, which approved H.R. 4868 to increase economic sanctions, which was enacted over President Reagan's veto, with a vote of 313 to 83 in the House and 78 to 21 in the Senate. Legislation passed through the Committee on International Relations has affected citizens of the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Throughout history, the committee has been composed of some of America's most able legislators and statesmen. Two American Presidents have served on it: James K. Polk, from 1827 to 1931, and John Quincy Adams, who became Chairman in 1842 after he returned to the House following his term as the Chief Executive. In more recent times, J. Danforth Quayle, former Vice President, served on the committee in the 96th Congress.

Many former Chairmen of the Committee have their names written in history books, such as Francis W. Pickens, who chaired the Committee from 1839 to 1841, who later became Governor of South Carolina and authorized the firing of Fort Sumter, which preceded the Civil War. Serving as Chairman in the aftermath of World War I, Stephen G. Porter of Pennsylvania came to be one of the most influential figures in the determination of American foreign policy in the early 1920s. Former Chairmen Sol Bloom of New York and James P. Richards of South Carolina have been recognized for their contributions to America's leadership in the immediate post-World War II period. The longest tenure as Chairman in the history of the committee was that of Thomas E. Morgan of Pennsylvania who served in that position from 1959 until the end of the 94th Congress in 1976.

Other former members of the Committee on International Relations include: Tom Connally of Texas, Champ Clark of Iowa, and J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, Mike Mansfield of Montana, Jacob Javits of New York, Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, Morris K. Udall of Arizona, and Connie Mack of Florida. Nine current U.S. Senators are former members of the committee: Robert C. Byrd from West Virginia, Olympia Snowe from Maine, Charles Schumer from New York, Mike DeWine from Ohio, Sam Brownback from Kansas, Robert Torricelli from New Jersey, Harry Reid from Nevada, John McCain from Arizona and Maria Cantwell of Washington.

Moreover, committee experience has provided a beginning for numerous individuals who have gone on to distinguish themselves in the diplomatic service of the country. Chairman of the 20th Congress, Edward Everett of Massachusetts, also served as Secretary of State, was a Whig Vice Presidential candidate in 1860, and is remembered as one of America's greatest orators. Also among the noteworthy diplomats is Perry Belmont, Chairman in the 49th and 50th Congresses who was U.S. Minister of Spain, in 1888-89 and was a noted author of work on international policies. His successor as Chairman in the 51st Congress was Robert R. Hitt of Ohio, Chief of the U.S. Delegation in Paris from 1874 to 1881 and subsequently was appointed Assistant Secretary of State. Christian A. Herter, who served as Secretary of State during the Eisenhower Administration, was a committee member in the 82nd Congress. More recent examples are: Charles Bowles, former Under Secretary of State and James W. Wadsworth, former U.S. Representative of the United Nations, F. Bradford Morse, United Nations Development Programs, E. Ross Adair, former Ambassador to Ethiopia and William S. Mailliard, former Ambassador to the Organization of America States.

| Congress | Chairman |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 108th [2003-Present] | Henry John Hyde |
| 107th [2001-2002] | Henry John Hyde |
| 104th-106th [1995 - 2000] | Benjamin Arthur Gilman |
| 103rd [1993 - 1994] | Lee Herbert Hamilton |
| 99th-102nd | |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| [1985 - 1992] | Dante Bruno Fascell |
| 98th [1983 - 1984] | Clement John Zablocki (1st session) Dante Bruno Fascell (2nd session) |
| 95th-97th [1977 - 1982] | Clement John Zablocki |
| 86th-94th [1959 - 1976] | Thomas Ellsworth Morgan |
| 85th [1957 - 1958] | Thomas Syivy Gordon |
| 84th [1955 - 1956] | James Prioleau Richardson |
| 83rd [1953 - 1954] | Robert Bruce Chiperfield |
| 82nd [1951 - 1952] | John Kee (1st session) (died in office 5/8/51) James Prioleau Richards (2nd session) |
| 81st [1949 - 1951] | Sol Bloom (1st session) John Kee (2nd session) |
| 80th [1947 - 1948] | Charles Aubrey Eaton |
| 77th-79th [1941 - 1946] | Sol Bloom |
| 76th [1939 - 1941] | Sam Davis McReynolds (1st session) Sam Davis McReynolds (2nd session) Sol Bloom (3rd session) |
| 73rd-75th [1933 - 1938] | Sam Davis McReynolds |
| 72nd [1931 - 1933] | John Charles Linthicum (1st session) Sam Davis McReynolds (2nd session) |
| 71st [1929-1931] | Stephen Geyer Porter (1st and 2nd sessions) Henry Wilson Temple (3rd session) |
| 66th-70th [1919 - 1929] | Stephen Geyer Porter |
| 63rd-65th [1913 - 1918] | Henry De La Warr Flood |
| 62nd [1911 - 1913] | William Sulzer |
| 61st [1909 - 1911] | James Breck Perkins (1st and 2nd sessions) David Johnson Foster (3rd session) |
| 60th [1907-1909] | Robert Gordon Cousins |
| 54th-59th [1895 - 1907] | Robert Roberts Hitt |
| 53rd [1893 - 1895] | James Bennett McCreary |
| 52nd [1891 - 1893] | James Henderson Blount |
| 51st [1889 - 1891] | Robert Roberts Hitt |
| 50th [1887 - 1889] | Perry Belmont (1st session) James Bennett McCreary (2nd session) |
| 49th | |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| [1885 - 1887] | Perry Belmont |
| 48th [1883 - 1885] | Andrew Gregg Curtin |
| 47th [1881 - 1883] | Charles Grandison Williams |
| 46th [1879 - 1881] | Samuel Sullivan Cox |
| 44th-45th [1875 - 1879] | Thomas Swann |
| 43rd [1873 - 1875] | Godlove Stein Orth |
| 39th-42nd [1865 - 1873] | Nathaniel Prentice Banks |
| 38th [1863 - 1865] | Henry Winter Davis |
| 37th [1861 - 1863] | John Jordan Crittenden |
| 36th [1859 - 1861] | Thomas Corwin |
| 35th [1857 - 1859] | Thomas Lanier Clingman (1st session) George Washington Hopkins (2nd session) |
| 34th [1855 - 1857] | Alexander C.M. Pennington |
| 32nd-33rd [1851 - 1855] | Thomas Henry Bayly |
| 31st [1849 - 1851] | John Alexander McClernand |
| 30th [1847 - 1849] | Truman Smith |
| 28th-29th [1843 - 1847] | Charles Jared Ingersoll |
| 27th [1841 - 1843] | Caleb Cushing (1st Session) John Quincy Adams (2nd Session) |
| 26th [1839 - 1841] | Francis Wilkinson Pickens |
| 25th [1837 - 1839] | Benjamin Chew Howard |
| 24th [1835 - 1837] | John Young Mason (1st session) Benjamin Chew Howard (2nd session) |
| 23rd [1833 - 1835] | William Segar Archer (1st session) James Moore Wayne (2nd session) |
| 22nd [1829 - 1833] | William Segar Archer |
| 20th [1827 - 1829] | Edward Everett |
| 18th-19th [1823 - 1827] | John Forsyth |
| 17th [1821 - 1823] | Jonathan Russell |