



Background:

Armed force encompasses any use or threat of violence to influence a situation. It is a powerful tool of foreign policy, but one that carries immense costs and risks. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide whether armed force is the best tool to influence the trajectory of a crisis and, if so, how to deploy its military to achieve its objectives while minimizing risks.

First, cover the fundamentals of this foreign policy tool with World101's lesson, [What Is Armed Force?](#) Then, put these principles into practice with Model Diplomacy's hypothetical decision point below.

Decision Point (*Hypothetical*):

Pugnaria has descended into a civil war after rebel groups challenged its autocratic government. The United States has long opposed the current government of Pugnaria and suspects it has harbored or aided anti-American terrorist groups in the past. The government is brutally quelling the rebellion. Without outside help, analysts fear the conflict could lead to tens of thousands of civilian deaths and spark a humanitarian crisis. The president has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss whether military intervention is appropriate and, if so, what form and level of support they will provide and for how long.

NSC members should consider the following policy options:

- *Mount a military intervention*, striking Pugnarian government targets and supporting rebels as they attempt to overthrow the government. This could lead to a pro-U.S. government being installed by the rebels, but carries a heavy cost, risks U.S. lives, and could lead to an extended and controversial commitment if the conflict cannot be resolved quickly.
- *Send arms to the rebels and provide training and intelligence support*. This option is cheaper than a military intervention and does not put U.S. lives at risk. However, the rebels, even with U.S. support, are not as capable as the U.S. military and their chances of success are lower.
- *Pursue nonviolent options*. The NSC could turn to other tools, such as sanctions and diplomacy, to secure a ceasefire. If successful, this option could avoid a long and costly conflict and keep U.S. forces entirely out of harm's way. However, other policy tools could well be insufficient to address the crisis, opening the United States to criticism for inaction.

Additional Resources:

1. [Global Conflict Tracker \(Council on Foreign Relations\)](#)
2. [The Use and Abuse of Military Force \(Brookings\)](#)
3. [Is a Better World Possible Without U.S. Military Force? \(Atlantic\)](#)

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Pop-Up Case Guidelines

Pop-up cases from Model Diplomacy are short case studies on current events that put students in the shoes of policymakers facing the most pressing issues in international relations. There are lots of ways to organize a discussion using a pop-up case. It is always helpful to think about your goals for the discussion and then to consider any time or participation constraints you could have. If you are teaching online and cannot discuss synchronously, consider a short writing assignment or using an online discussion board (see some excellent tips [here](#) and [here](#)). If you are teaching face-to-face or over videoconference and are looking for some inspiration, here are a few ideas:

Gauge reaction:

If you want to show what students are thinking before diving into the discussion, here are two easy ways to do it. In one, often called “four corners,” assign each policy option to a corner of the room, and then ask students to stand in the corner associated with the policy option they support. In the other, if you want your students to think along a spectrum instead (e.g., interventionist-isolationist, unilateral-multilateral, more urgent–less urgent), put the ends of your spectrum at either end of your blackboard and have students stand along the board to indicate where along the spectrum they fall. With both approaches, everyone will sit down again with a sense of where they stand regarding the case. Use this knowledge to shape discussion—eliciting less popular opinions, challenging more popular ones, encouraging like-minded students to further develop their ideas, or having students who disagree discuss in small groups.

Think-Pair-Share:

This exercise is particularly useful for groups where some students are hesitant. Ask everyone to spend a few minutes quietly gathering their thoughts and articulating them in a notebook (“think”), then have them turn to the person sitting next to them to compare notes (“pair”), and then have students report out to the whole group (“share”), knowing that everyone will have had time to think through something to say.

Whiparound:

Ask students to briefly share their position one after the other without responding to each other. Typically, everyone speaks in the order they are sitting. This can be a way to see where everyone stands before launching into a discussion. If you expect a topic to be particularly contentious, you could have students listen to each other and then reflect in writing.



Simple NSC simulation:

If you would like to simulate a simplified version of a more realistic policy debate, you can appoint yourself (or a randomly chosen student) president. Ask students to debate the policy options (or come up with new ones) and try to reach consensus on a recommendation to the president.

NSC simulation with assigned opinions:

While assigning individual roles for a brief case study is complicated, you could assign opinions. For example, assign one-third of the class to be isolationist, one-third to favor a military response, and one-third to favor a diplomatic response. Let the groups caucus for a few minutes, then present their policy options and debate them, leaving the final decision up to you (or a student) as president.

Note: In our experience, simulations are often most productive if students imagine they are advising a generic president rather than a specific one.

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