Background:
Arms control agreements are a specialized subset of diplomacy that limit developing, testing, producing, deploying, or using certain types of weapons. They can prevent costly and destabilizing arms races. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide how to use arms control to reduce the threat posed by one relatively new category of arms: anti-satellite weapons (ASATs).

First, cover the fundamentals of this foreign policy tool with World101’s lesson, What Is Arms Control? Then, put these principles into practice with Model Diplomacy’s hypothetical decision point below.

Decision Point (Hypothetical):

Intelligence indicates that Dacan, a longtime U.S. rival, is expanding its arsenal of anti-satellite weapons, which could knock out U.S. communication, navigation, surveillance, weapons guidance, and nuclear early-warning systems. Essentially, an anti-satellite attack could rob the United States of many technological advantages it could otherwise use in a conflict. The United States has more advanced anti-satellite capabilities than Dacan, but both countries are largely unable to defend their satellites. As a result, both have an incentive to move quickly at the earliest sign that the other is considering using their ASATs. This situation could also lead to an arms race over ASAT weapons and satellite defensive systems. Accordingly, the president has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss whether and how to pursue new arms control measures that would limit this threat. NSC members should consider how broad any agreement should be, how to verify any agreement, and whether limiting the danger that ASATs pose is worth constraining U.S. capabilities.

NSC members should consider the following policy options:

• Negotiate a treaty on ASATs requiring reductions in arsenal size and limits on testing. This provides the strongest guarantee of a reduced threat from Dacan’s ASATs. It could also preserve the current U.S. advantage. Yet it would still require both the United States and Dacan to compromise their own capabilities. Negotiations would also be difficult as they would need to establish what limitations the treaty should include and how the agreement could be monitored.

• Announce unilateral measures in the hope that Dacan follows suit. These could include disclosures about U.S. ASAT capabilities, policy declarations around using ASATs, or even voluntary force reductions. This could be done quickly and undone if Dacan does not reciprocate. It could also build trust toward a formal agreement. However, this option still requires sacrificing military capability with no verifiable guarantees in return.

• Do not pursue an arms control agreement with Dacan, and focus on developing offensive and defensive capabilities. Researching satellite defenses could mitigate threats, and strengthening U.S. readiness could act as a deterrent or allow for a preemptive strike if necessary. Yet this option does nothing to limit Dacan’s ASAT capabilities and could encourage an arms race that increases the risk of an accident or preemptive strike.

Additional Resources:
3. No-First-Use Policy Explained (Union of Concerned Scientists)

Like Model Diplomacy? Try a full case at modeldiplomacy.cfr.org.
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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