

Pop-Up Case: Economic Statecraft: Foreign Assistance



Background:

Economic statecraft describes the various economic tools countries use—such as lending, foreign assistance, sanctions, and trade agreements—to advance their foreign policy priorities. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide whether to help a country in crisis and, if so, how to best employ a specific tool of economic statecraft: foreign aid.

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

Decision Point (*Hypothetical*):

Drought and flood cycles caused by climate change have ravaged Durhan's most important crop, corn. This has resulted in farmers losing their livelihoods, a decline in Durhan's gross domestic product, and near-famine conditions in many parts of the country. Although Durhan's economy is in shambles, its geographic location means that it could be a useful strategic partner for the United States. Durhan is positioned along two major trade routes, including a crucial port, and is near several countries that U.S. intelligence suspects of harboring terrorists. The U.S. president has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to decide if the United States should provide foreign assistance to Durhan and whether to place conditions on it.

NSC members should consider the following policy options:

- *Offer assistance to Durhan, but require security cooperation in return.* The aid could include both immediate humanitarian aid, as well as investment in developing drought-resistant farming and alternative industries. The security cooperation could include a refueling and resupply agreement for passing U.S. Navy vessels, the use of an airbase for drone flights, and intelligence sharing. Such an agreement could fulfill goals for both countries. However, Durhan may reject the proposal, leaving the United States looking uncharitable.
- *Offer assistance to Durhan without requiring any conditions.* The aid package could be similar to the previous option, but the United States would ask nothing explicitly in return. However, the goodwill generated could lead to security cooperation in the future. Such an offer would alleviate suffering in Durhan, but does not guarantee any tangible benefit to the United States.
- *Provide no assistance to Durhan, but encourage other countries or international organizations to send help.* This option could allow limited government resources to be devoted to other priorities, such as research into developing new drought-resistant crops at U.S. universities. Although this option does nothing to alleviate immediate suffering in Durhan, it could lead to breakthroughs down the road. It also risks hurting the U.S. image abroad and does nothing to advance U.S. strategic interests in the region around Durhan.

Additional Resources:

1. [A Brief History of U.S. Foreign Aid \(World101\)](#)
2. [What Every American Should Know About US Foreign Aid \(Brookings\)](#)
3. [Why International Aid so Often Falls Short \(Washington Post\)](#)

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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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