Background:

The world lacks a global police force capable of stopping violence in its tracks. However, it does have UN peacekeepers, who can help wind down conflicts and prevent them from recurring. Peacekeeping missions face limitations depending on a conflict’s scale and scope. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to determine whether it should support a peacekeeping mission in a country riddled with ethnic conflict.

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

Decision Point (Hypothetical):

The neighboring countries of Rovinia and Tomania have been fighting a long-running war over their shared border. The two countries have recently reached a UN-brokered ceasefire. Both countries are distrustful of each other, and so observers worry that the conflict could easily flare up again due to a misunderstanding. Furthermore, the war has created thousands of refugees. In particular, Tomania has been slow to offer protection or aid to refugees and displaced persons within its borders, and isolated attacks against ethnic Rovinians who ended up on the Tomanian side of the ceasefire line have been reported. The UN Security Council is discussing sending a peacekeeping mission to Rovinia and Tomania. Both countries would need to consent to the mission, and they are open to the idea, albeit cautiously. The question of the mission’s mandate—what it is assigned to accomplish and what powers and resources it is given—is still up in the air. The president has asked the National Security Council (NSC) to convene to discuss whether the United States should support a peacekeeping mission and, if so, how expansive a mandate to advocate for.

NSC members should consider one of the following policy options:

1. Support a UN-led peacekeeping mission with an expansive mandate. This would include monitoring and reporting as well as protection for refugees and aid deliveries using armed troops and armored vehicles. Such a mission could both lower the risks of the conflict breaking out again and alleviate suffering among civilians. It could also defend itself and civilians if conflict were to break out. However, consent from the host countries for such a large military presence could prove difficult to gain. Furthermore, it is not at all clear it would succeed.

2. Support a limited UN-led peacekeeping mission focused on monitoring and reporting along the border, consisting of only a handful of lightly armed troops and a few surveillance drones. Such a mission could build trust and decrease the chances of war breaking out again, but could not help civilians suffering from the conflict’s effects or step in if the ceasefire were violated.

3. Oppose a peacekeeping mission. With the threat of renewed conflict so great, and considering the threat of attacks on civilians in Tomania, delaying a peacekeeping mission could be preferable until the situation is more stable.

Additional Resources:

1. The Role of Peacekeeping in Africa (Council on Foreign Relations)
2. The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can’t End Wars (Foreign Affairs)
3. U.N. Peacekeeping Really Can Be Effective. Here’s How We Tabulated This. (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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