



### Background:

Soft power is a country's ability to influence others through example and the normal actions of a society. In practice, this process entails countries projecting their values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships. This can build admiration and respect that makes working with other countries easier. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide whether and how it can enhance its standing in the world to help pursue its interests.

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

### Decision Point (*Hypothetical*):

A recently published report has detailed several international polls revealing increased anti-American sentiment worldwide, indicating a decline in the United States' soft power. At the same time, the report documents increasing global favor for Nemessia—a powerful U.S. rival. Worryingly, those trends have been particularly pronounced in several countries that have long been close trade partners. Analysts predict that with less persuasive power, the United States will have a harder time cooperating with other countries or could be forced to use coercive policy tools like sanctions more often. The president has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to determine what, if anything, the U.S. government should do to bolster U.S. soft power.

**NSC members should consider one of the following policy options:**

- *Devote significant new funding to sweeping cultural, educational, and scientific programs, along with a media campaign.* This could lead to more favorable foreign policy outcomes without requiring coercion. However, it would demand a large investment, potentially at the expense of other objectives.
- *Maintain current investment in soft power initiatives such as media outlets and educational exchange programs, but devote no new funds.* This option would save funds for other priorities, and does not necessarily entail losing U.S. soft power. However, it does nothing to actively address the declining U.S. image abroad. If current trends hold, achieving other U.S. foreign policy goals could become more difficult and potentially require policymakers to rely more heavily on costlier coercive tools.
- *Prioritize investment in hard power, funding military and economic endeavors, such as overseas bases or foreign assistance programs, designed to counter Nemessia's growing influence.* This option could bolster U.S. readiness to address foreign policy challenges, but it carries the greatest risk of allowing the U.S. image to continue eroding, requiring greater reliance on hard power tools.

### Additional Resources:

1. [The Rise and Fall of Soft Power \(Foreign Policy\)](#)
2. [The Benefits of Soft Power \(Harvard Business School\)](#)
3. [China's Big Bet on Soft Power \(Council on Foreign Relations\)](#)

**Like Model Diplomacy? Try a full case at [modeldiplomacy.cfr.org](http://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.*

**Like Model Diplomacy? Try a full case at [modeldiplomacy.cfr.org](https://modeldiplomacy.cfr.org).**