

Mini Simulation

Armed Force

Overview

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.

The Situation

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

Decision Point

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.

Photo: An Israeli soldier looks on as a helicopter delivers troops injured in fighting in Lebanon to a hospital in the northern Israeli town of Haifa on August 9, 2006.

Source: Finbarr O'Reilly/Reuters

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