

Mini Simulation

Deterrence

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Overview

Deterrence means discouraging unwanted behavior through the threat of significant punishment. Sometimes the threat of severe consequences is enough to discourage or deter a threat without requiring governments to act. However, to be effective, deterrence requires that a country make credible threats and be capable of carrying them out. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide how best to use deterrence to block threats against itself and its allies.

The Situation

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

Decision Point

Relations between Berezia, a regional powerhouse and long-time U.S. adversary, and its neighbor Oratania have grown strained in recent years as Oratania has built closer ties with the United States. Fearing the expansion of U.S. influence over Oratania, Berezia has escalated tensions. Yesterday, new satellite images of the region showed Berezian military forces massing on the border with Oratania, potentially signaling an impending invasion. Oratania would likely be unable to defend itself for long against its militarily stronger neighbor. Complicating matters further, Oratania borders several U.S. treaty allies, raising concerns that a conflict in Oratania could threaten their security as well. Accordingly, the president of the United States has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss what steps it can take to deter Berezian aggression against Oratania and reassure regional allies of their security. NSC members will need to consider how they can credibly deter an attack while safeguarding against any actions that could provoke one.

NSC members should consider the following policy options:

- *Threaten severe economic sanctions on Berezia if it invades.* This option is relatively low-cost and minimizes the risk of an accident or miscalculation sparking conflict, or of drawing U.S. forces into a conflict. However, the threat of sanctions alone could be insufficient to deter Berezia.
- *Provide the Oratanian military with equipment and training.* This would show more robust U.S. support for Oratania, and a stronger Oratanian military could raise the costs of an invasion for Berezia, potentially changing their calculations. However, it also carries a greater risk of escalating tensions or provoking an attack if Berezia misinterprets U.S. efforts as a provocation.
- *Provide Oratania with direct military assistance by sending military assets, such as an aircraft carrier group, to the region.* This option provides the strongest deterrent, demonstrating U.S. resolve to defend Oratania and preparing the United States to do so if necessary. However, it also requires a large and sustained commitment of U.S. resources and bears the most significant risk to U.S. lives if deterrence fails and a conflict breaks out.

Photo: A deactivated nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile at the Titan Missile Museum in Green Valley,

Arizona on May 12, 2015.

Source: Brendan Smialowski/Getty Images

[The Best Defense? An Alternative to All-Out War or Nothing](#)Brookings

[Nuclear Deterrence Today](#) NATO Review

[Deterrence: I Don't Think It Means What You Think It Means](#)Modern War Institute