

Mini Simulation

Intelligence: Covert Action

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Overview

Intelligence is both a product and a process, acquired through espionage (spying) and practiced through covert action. Its goal is to provide governments with an unbiased view of what is happening in the world. Intelligence enables policymakers to make better-informed decisions—and to keep people safe from threats. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide if and how it should use covert action—one component of intelligence—to address a national security threat.

The Situation

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

Decision Point

Longtime U.S. adversary Mypos has conquered one of its neighboring countries. The invasion, orchestrated by Mypos's dictator, Lukano, threatens to spread fascism in the region. Arondale, the United States' closest partner in proximity to Mypos, is threatened by the invasion. Over the past year, the United States and its allies have been unable to halt Mypos's ambitions to influence the region. Moreover, Mypos has launched persistent [cyberattacks](#), attempting to destabilize U.S. institutions. Previous National Security Council (NSC) meetings have concluded that the option of war is momentarily off the table. However, the U.S. president would like to deliberate whether the United States should take alternative actions. Intelligence suggests that a small resistance movement in Mypos exists. However, with the fascist Lukano gaining a following in countries surrounding Mypos, the time has come for the United States to act. As a result, the U.S. president has convened an NSC meeting to decide if and how the United States should pursue covert action to minimize Mypos's control over the region.

NSC members should consider one of the following policy options:

- *Initiate a propaganda campaign that covertly disseminates anti-fascist messaging through the media in countries under or near Mypos's control.* This option could minimize the growing popularity of Mypos's fascist leader, Lukano, and does not risk collateral damage. However, this campaign could take time to unfold, leaving Arondale at risk of a takeover from Mypos.
- *Covertly influence Mypos's government through political and economic action, supporting the political opposition and initiatives against Lukano.* This option could help support the opposition in the country and allow the United States to shift Mypos policies closer to U.S. interests. However, this option would not necessarily stop a Myposian takeover of Arondale.
- *Initiate a paramilitary operation, sending intelligence agents to conduct raids and covertly train and equip members of the Myposian opposition to remove Lukano from power.* This option could minimize the anti-American and fascist influence in the region. Moreover, a paramilitary operation would reduce the threat of Mypos taking over Arondale. However, it could destabilize the people and institutions of Mypos and create anti-American sentiment abroad. This decision could also be unpopular if Americans found out. This option also requires

the most personnel, funds, and resources.

- *Do not take covert action, but continue to search for a solution to the emerging threats from Mypos.* This option enables the United States to avoid controversy and complications that could arise from covert operations. However, the inability to act could result in the United States losing a close partner, Arondale, to Mypos. Furthermore, this option risks anti-American Lukano gaining influence in the entire region, threatening U.S. national security.

[Covert Action](#) Belfer Center

[When the CIA Interferes in Foreign Elections: A Modern-Day History of American ...](#) Foreign Affairs

[The Appeal of Covert Action: Psychology and the Future of Irregular Warfare](#) Modern War Institute