

Mark your confusion.  
Show evidence of a close reading.  
Write a 1+ page reflection.

## **PRO/CON: Should U.S. troops be fighting Ebola in West Africa?**

Source Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff, December 12, 2014

### **PRO: U.S. troops are skilled at assisting in emergencies.**

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama was right to dispatch U.S. military units to help combat an Ebola outbreak in West Africa. But he did it for the wrong reasons.

Obama called it a “national security” mission — a clear misuse of the term. Americans should be wary of Washington’s growing tendency to make every project a priority simply by adding the word “security” to the issue.

National security efforts must be controlled by the government, at the highest levels. So when our government says it wants to focus on climate security, energy security, food security — what it is really saying is that the government plans to step in and take over.

For most of life’s challenges and hazards — even those where we might want the government to take some action — we certainly don’t want Washington to take over.

#### **An Appropriate Response**

True “national security” issues arise due to actions by countries or extremist groups like al-Qaida that threaten the violent destruction of interests to the United States. Other types of challenges — be they bad bugs or bad weather — are just problems to be solved.

The challenge of keeping Ebola from becoming a global problem is not mainly a security problem. Helping West Africa deal with Ebola is a humanitarian mission.

It is, of course, entirely appropriate for the U.S. to provide humanitarian assistance when we have the means to do so and it does not conflict with America’s interest.

America’s humanitarian response to the 2004 Tsunami in the Asia-Pacific dwarfed the assistance provided by most countries.

Further, the U.S. military undertakes these kinds of missions quite frequently, both at home and abroad. Be it sandbagging during storms or delivering supplies and rescue services after disaster strikes, our military is skilled at assisting in non-military emergencies. It is not the principal job for our armed forces, but these are appropriate auxiliary missions — tasks to be done when U.S. troops are needed and available.

The right measure of these missions is whether or not they are suitable, possible and acceptable.

Without question, the West African crisis is a suitable use of U.S. forces. The Pentagon can quickly deploy expertise, support and infrastructure that will help local organizations stop the spread of the disease.

#### **Defeat Ebola At Its Source**

There’s self-interest here as well. The best way to keep more Ebola cases from checking in at the nearest Holiday Inn is to help defeat the outbreak at its source. Alternative ways of containing the outbreak — like banning travel and yanking visas — are much less targeted.

The West African deployment also passes the “possible” and “acceptable” tests. This is not to say the mission poses zero risks to our troops.

Even medical professionals who try to take all the right precautions have caught the disease. But, our troops are disciplined, and they should know the measures to take to lower their risk.

They are also brave, courageous and willing volunteers. They understand the danger. That is part of the job.

Rather than just appealing to “national security,” the White House should have classified the operation correctly — as a humanitarian mission — and explained the reason for this auxiliary mission to the American people.

Words are important, and so are actions. Mislabeling missions, as Obama did earlier in calling our offensive against the extremist group Islamic State a “humanitarian” mission, suggests a dangerous confusion about the nature of true national security risks and the principle function of our military.

It also raises concern about the conduct of this mission. Has the White House organized operations efficiently and sent enough troops to West Africa? Or is the president simply throwing some troops at the problem so he can say he's done something?

### **CON: The U.S. military is already overextended.**

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is using American troops to combat Ebola to show the world he cares enough to send our very best. But our soldiers aren't Hallmark greeting cards.

Like many of Obama's foreign policy plans, his Ebola plan has a ready-shoot-aim quality to it. Here are reasons why our military isn't the best vehicle for offering assistance:

Our military is already overextended. The president has decided to cut the Army from its wartime high of 570,000 soldiers to 440,000. The administration's Quadrennial Defense Review said this "strains our ability" to simultaneously respond to more than one major military action at a time.

That assessment came before the president announced plans to send 4,000 soldiers to West Africa, a number sure to grow given the president's recent decision to call up National Guard soldiers waiting on reserve. It was also before military operations were launched against the extremist group Islamic State, a campaign that may ultimately require ground forces.

#### **"Panic Leads to Violence"**

In light of these developments, Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno recently questioned the wisdom of continuing with the plan to reduce U.S. forces.

Military intervention in West Africa risks a quagmire — a situation from which there is no escape. Though the media has focused on the military's humanitarian role in the Ebola crisis, it would also likely have a security one as well.

The Council on Foreign Relations' Janine Davidson noted, "As the disease spreads, so does panic — and panic leads to violence." Maintaining order in African countries will pose serious risks.

For one, it would require a significantly greater U.S. commitment than announced so far, stretching our military even further. The World Health Organization forecasts that new Ebola cases could rise by 10,000 per week by December. That could cause a lot of panic and violence that would need to be subdued.

For another, it could place our soldiers in an impossible position, such as one in which Liberian soldiers recently found themselves. They had to choose between their safety and the public's when violent rioting triggered by a quarantine left four people wounded and one 16-year-old boy dead.

Imagine U.S. soldiers being forced to make the same choice: Having to shoot unarmed, possibly infected Liberian civilians or allow Ebola to spread.

#### **Going Into Unstable Countries**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) isn't ready. All of the Ebola patients who contracted the disease on U.S. soil were full-time health care professionals who did so while treating the disease under the guidance of the CDC. The CDC has flubbed its dress rehearsal, and clearly is not ready for the big show.

Bringing the military into humanitarian aid risks getting dragged into disputes inside the West African countries. All three countries at the center of the Ebola epidemic are politically unstable.

Sierra Leone and Liberia have only in recent years emerged from civil wars. Guinea was ruled by the military until 2010. Both Liberia and Guinea have canceled upcoming elections. We're told these countries are so unstable that just banning U.S. travel to the countries could send them into chaos.

"You isolate them, you can cause unrest in the country," said the National Institutes of Health's Anthony Fauci. "It's conceivable that government could fall."

Meanwhile, the Obama administration remains opposed to travel bans, the one measure that might provide Americans some protection.

Our soldiers are being placed at enormous risk all because the president is unwilling to stop the flow of potentially infected people from afflicted African countries.

#### **Possible Response Questions:**

- Should U.S. troops be fighting Ebola in West Africa? Explain.
- Identify and analyze the persuasive techniques employed by the writer.
- Select any passage and respond to it.