

[Simulation](#) from [International Institutions & Global Governance](#) and [Foreign Policy](#)

Russia and NATO in the Baltics in 2016 (NSC)

Set in July 2016. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, a NATO summit approaches as the Baltics face threats from Russia.

Case Overview

Set in July 2016. Since Russia's [annexation](#) of the Ukrainian peninsula of [Crimea](#) in 2014, the United States has debated how to best support the Baltic States, three small countries wedged between Russia and the Baltic Sea. Those states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—are fellow members of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#), which the United States is bound by treaty to help defend. Given Russia's willingness to openly flout the [sovereignty](#) of its neighbors and its increasingly aggressive military presence in the Baltic region, the United States worries that Russia could continue an expansionist policy.

Before the biennial NATO summit, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) will convene to determine a policy to address Baltic security that the United States will articulate at the gathering. As the NSC deliberates, it needs to consider the possibility that Russian actions in Ukraine could be replayed in the Baltics.

Guide

Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

The United States plays a critical role in establishing and maintaining international order. This is particularly true in an increasingly globalized world. The range of foreign policy issues that require its attention is vast. The United States must consider foreign policy issues from conflicts in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Syria to tensions with Iran and North Korea; from long-standing alliances to complex, evolving relationships with Brazil, China, India, Russia, and South Africa. Issues on the agenda range from the stability of global finance to the promotion of economic opportunity in low-income countries; and from climate to health to nuclear proliferation to terrorism. The United States has a vested interest in myriad world affairs. Further, issues such as immigration, trade, cybersecurity, climate change, and global health underscore the fading distinction between domestic and international matters.

U.S. leaders use a range of tools to pursue a foreign policy to safeguard national security and achieve U.S. goals:

- diplomatic: consultations and negotiations, treaties, defense and security agreements, resolutions at global and regional bodies such as the United Nations, and public diplomacy to promote U.S. views and culture
- economic: trade and investment agreements, tariffs, sanctions, embargoes, development assistance, loans for the purchase of U.S.-manufactured products, and sales of arms, equipment, and technology
- military: missile strikes, nuclear deterrence, ground force deployments, ship and submarine patrols, blockades, unilateral or partnered military exercises, foreign military training, and special operations forces
- unconventional actions: undertaken by the U.S. government and its proxies, such as training and assisting foreign intelligence services, supporting armed nonstate actors, private security contracting, and cyberwarfare

Effective policymaking requires a deft combination of these tools. To accomplish this, policymakers must clearly define U.S. interests. Policymakers then gauge the interests, resources, and motivations of foreign governments and nonstate actors. The U.S. intelligence community supports policymakers by collecting and analyzing a vast range of information, including satellite images, communications records, and other data.

Foreign policy successes and failures are often associated with presidential decisions. Less explored is the decision-making system that helps the president make those critical choices and coordinate their implementation. This guide will help you understand the system through which the United States creates and implements its foreign policy.

To learn more about the NSC, check out these readings:

- [“What is the National Security Council?”](#) YouTube video, 2:28, posted by CFR Education, August 28, 2023.
- [“National Security Council,”](#) The White House.
- David J. Rothkopf, [“Presidents and the National Security Council,”](#) Interview by Bernard Gwertzman, Council on Foreign Relations, November 12, 2008.

Interagency Process

Regardless of the scale of the problem, a successful foreign policy-making process starts by defining interests and goals. Policymakers and their advisors then formulate policy options to meet those goals and consider each option’s strengths and weaknesses. This process is challenging. In the best of times information can be unreliable or incomplete or an adversary’s intentions can be unclear. Often a decision’s consequences can be unknowable. Leaders frequently have to choose from a list on which every option is imperfect. Adding to this uncertainty is the complexity of the U.S. government’s foreign policy machinery. Numerous agencies—each with its own interests and biases—seek to influence how policy is decided and carried out. It takes considerable effort to run a process capable of producing sound policy decisions.

The National Security Council (NSC) plays a critical role in this effort. Its mission is to help the president effectively use a variety of instruments—military, diplomatic, or otherwise—to forge policies that advance U.S. national security goals.

The NSC was created by the National Security Act of 1947. This act defined the NSC as an interagency body intended to “advise the president with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security.” The period after World War II was an age of expanded American interests and responsibilities. The NSC was expected to provide a place where the heads of federal departments and agencies could cooperate to develop recommendations for policies that would advance U.S. aims. The NSC and its staff were also meant to manage the policymaking process. This ensured that the president would receive a full range of advice and opinion from the departments and agencies involved in national security.

The NSC has evolved significantly over the years. The NSC has adapted to the preferences of successive presidents and the challenges they faced. Variables such as the attendees, the frequency of meetings, the manner in which information is passed to the president, the importance of consensus, and the relative dominance of the NSC over other government institutions have changed over the decades.

The NSC has evolved to comprise various interagency committees and a large staff to prepare analysis and coordinate policymaking and implementation. The NSC is at the center of the interagency process. This process is one through which relevant government agencies address foreign policy issues and help the president make and execute policy choices.

I. National Security Advisor

The national security advisor (formally assistant to the president for national security affairs) is at the heart of the NSC structure. The national security advisor's role is twofold: to offer advice to the president and to coordinate and manage policymaking. Because they have direct access to the president and do not represent a cabinet department, national security advisors are in a unique position. From this neutral perch they drive foreign policy decisions, manage the actors involved, and mitigate conflict throughout the decision-making process.

II. National Security Council Staff

The NSC staff consists of individuals from a collection of agencies that support the president, the vice president, and the administration. NSC staff members are generally organized into directorates that focus on regions or issues. The size and organization of the staff vary with each administration.

The NSC staff provides expertise for the variety of national security policy matters under consideration. It manages numerous responsibilities, including preparing speeches, memos, and discussion papers and handling inquiries from Congress on foreign policy issues. Staff members analyze both immediate and long-standing issues and help prioritize the agenda.

III. Committee Structure

Committees are at the core of policy deliberation and policymaking in the NSC. They fall into four categories:

- The highest level is the National Security Council itself. Formal NSC meetings are chaired by the president and include individuals named by the National Security Act of 1947 as well as other senior aides the president invites.
- The Principals Committee (PC) comprises cabinet-level officials who head major government departments concerned with national security, such as the secretaries of state and defense. The national security advisor traditionally chairs the Principals Committee.
- The Deputies Committee (DC) includes the deputy leaders of the government departments represented on the principals committee and is chaired by the deputy national security advisor.
- Interagency Policy Committees (IPCs) cover a range of regional areas and issues. Each committee includes officials who specialize in the relevant area or issue at one of the departments or agencies in the interagency system. IPCs are generally chaired by senior directors on the NSC staff. Much of the day-to-day work needed to formulate and implement foreign policy across the U.S. government happens at the IPC level.

This committee structure tackles both immediate crises such as an outbreak of conflict and enduring issues such as climate change. IPCs conduct analysis on an issue, gather views on it and its importance from various departments, formulate and evaluate policy options, and determine what resources and steps would be required to carry out those options. The Deputies Committee manages the interagency process up and down. It decides what IPCs to establish, and gives them specific assignments. It also considers information submitted by the IPCs before relaying it to the Principals Committee or the full NSC.

The Principals Committee is the highest-level setting, aside from the NSC itself, for debating national security issues. It consists of the heads of the NSC's component agencies. The Principals Committee is essentially all the members of the NSC except the president and vice president. Formal NSC meetings, which the president chairs, occur whenever the president sees fit. They consider issues that require the president's personal attention and a direct presidential decision.

The goal of this committee structure is to foster consensus on policy options or highlight where and why consensus cannot be reached. If officials at one level agree on an issue, it does not need to go to senior officials for a decision. This practice reserves the president's time and that of members of the Principals Committee for the most complicated and sensitive debates.

When a crisis erupts issues sometimes do not follow the usual path up from the IPCs. In these cases, NSC staff members and officials in government departments and agencies generally draft papers drawing on their expertise, available intelligence, and any existing contingency plans. Policy options are then debated and decided at the appropriate level. The policymaking process can also deviate from this model based on the preferences of each president.

For the purposes of this NSC simulation, you will role-play the NSC meeting with the assumption that the committees described have already done their jobs. Any critical information has already been passed to the highest-level decision-makers.

Presidential Decisions

When the president makes a policy decision, it can take the form of a verbal instruction recorded and shared with relevant departments and agencies. The president can also issue formal decisions in documents that lay out the administration's policy and explain its rationale and goals. These documents have gone by [different names under different presidents](#). President Joe Biden issues national security memoranda and national security study memoranda. President Donald Trump issued national security presidential memoranda.

The president can also issue an executive order (EO). EOs are a more formal and public declaration of policy. In contrast, national security directives are generally directed internally to federal departments and are often classified. In the past, presidents have [issued EOs](#) for such purposes as facilitating sanctions against foreign individuals and establishing new offices in government departments to carry out foreign policy aims. For federal agencies, both national security directives and executive orders carry the full force of law.

Departments and Agencies

Although many executive branch departments and agencies are involved in foreign policy, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the intelligence community form the core of the foreign policy bureaucracy. The Department of the Treasury, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice often play crucial roles as well.

Department of State

The Department of State conducts the United States' relations with other countries and international organizations. It maintains U.S. diplomatic presence abroad. The Department of State also issues visas for foreigners to enter the country, aids U.S. citizens overseas, and manages other programs to promote American interests. The [secretary of state](#) is the president's principal foreign affairs advisor and has a keen understanding of the United States' international relations. They are also well informed on the relationships between foreign countries, and the behavior and interests of their governments.

Department of Defense

The Department of Defense carries out U.S. defense policy and maintains U.S. military forces. It includes the U.S. [Army](#), [Navy](#), [Marine Corps](#), and [Air Force](#), as well as an array of agencies related to defense. The department employs more than two million military and civilian personnel and operates military bases around the world. The [secretary of defense](#) is the head of the department and the president's principal defense policy advisor. They also stay up-to-date on the security situation in foreign countries and the possibilities and implications of U.S. military involvement. The [chairman of the joint chiefs of staff](#) is the highest-ranking member of the U.S. armed forces and the president's top military advisor.

Intelligence Community

The U.S. intelligence community consists of eighteen agencies and organizations, including the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) (CIA), [National Security Agency](#) (NSA), and [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI), which gather and analyze intelligence.

Each of these agencies has its own mission; for example, the NSA focuses on signals intelligence (information gathered from communications and other electronic signals) and the [Defense Intelligence Agency](#) on military information. The [director of national intelligence](#) is the president's principal advisor on intelligence issues. They oversee this network of agencies with the aim of ensuring that they work together and deliver the best possible information to U.S. policymakers.

Department of the Treasury

The Department of the Treasury carries out policy on issues related to the U.S. and global economies and financial systems. The [secretary of the treasury](#) serves as one of the president's chief economic advisors and is responsible for addressing a range of economic concerns. The Treasury's ten bureaus, which include the [U.S. Mint](#) and the [Internal Revenue Service](#), do much of the department's work, which ranges from collecting tax to printing currency and executing economic sanctions.

Department of Homeland Security

Created soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security works to counter and respond to risks to American security. It focuses on issues such as terrorism prevention, border security and immigration, disaster response, and cybersecurity. Familiar agencies within the department include [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#), the [U.S. Secret Service](#), and the [Transportation Security Administration](#). The [secretary of homeland security](#) oversees the department and advises the president on relevant issues.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice investigates and prosecutes possible violations of federal law. The Department of Justice represents the U.S. government in legal matters and works more broadly to prevent and respond to crime. Agencies such as the [FBI](#) and the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) are part of the department, as are divisions focusing on particular areas of law, such as national security and civil rights. Leading the department is the [attorney general](#), who offers legal advice to the president and the heads of other departments.

Case Notes

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

Instructions

How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play

The Issue

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—collectively known as the Baltic states—are three small countries wedged between Russia and the Baltic Sea. Their total population numbers fewer than six million, and together their land area is smaller than Missouri.

At first glance, the Baltic states' security can seem beyond question. They are members of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) and [European Union \(EU\)](#), the two multinational institutions that anchor the Western order in North America and Europe. Yet despite the protection and solidarity that NATO and EU membership provide, the Baltic states feel a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability because they are territorially small and militarily weak. Their economies, though prosperous, are tiny relative to those of other NATO and EU members; the Baltics also include significant ethnic Russian populations, as the states were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, or [Soviet Union](#)) for decades until its 1991 collapse. This historical and demographic backdrop shapes the countries' domestic and [alliance](#) politics, and their tenuous relations with present-day Russia.

In 2014, Russia seized the Ukrainian peninsula of [Crimea](#). Shortly afterward, its military began covertly supporting pro-Russian insurgencies in eastern Ukraine. Like the Baltic states, Ukraine is a former Soviet territory and home to ethnic Russian populations. Western governments have worried Russia could similarly exploit the vulnerabilities of the Baltic states. Article 5 of the [North Atlantic Treaty](#), NATO's founding document, commits its members to defend any member that is attacked. Pressure on the Baltics would thus bring into play the most basic of U.S. diplomatic commitments—to defend a treaty ally. In such a confrontation, U.S. choices would be complicated not only by Russia's military might and the weakness of its tiny neighbors, but also by the intricate interethnic relations of post-Soviet states.

Decision Point—Set in July 2016

It is July, 2016. American policymakers need to decide how to support the Baltic states now that Russia has annexed Crimea. Russia's willingness to openly flout the [sovereignty](#) of its neighbors leaves the United States worried Russia could continue an expansionist policy.

Underscoring that fear was Russia's increasingly aggressive military presence in the Baltic region. In the years before the [annexation](#) of Crimea, the territory around the Baltics had seen Russian military buildup, including increased submarine [patrols](#) around NATO territory, military drills, and air patrols. In April 2016, tensions flared after the White House [reported](#) that a Russian plane had flown "dangerously close" to a U.S. ship and a Polish plane in the Baltic Sea. In a separate incident later that month, a Russian fighter jet [came within one hundred feet](#) of an American reconnaissance plane over the Baltic Sea. During the following months, Latvia several times [identified](#) Russian military ships and aircraft near its waters and airspace.

The biennial NATO summit is scheduled to convene in Warsaw, Poland, in July of this year (2016). Because tensions with Russia in the Baltic region have been mounting, discussing the alliance's eastern flank will occupy much of the summit's agenda. In advance of the meeting, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) will convene to determine a policy to address Baltic security that it will articulate at the summit. As the United States deliberates, it needs to consider that Russian actions in Ukraine—including the exploitation of a neighbor's internal divisions, the infiltration of special operations forces, a buildup of regular units on the border, and a potential Russian seizure of neighboring territory—could be replayed in the Baltics. The stakes for the United States and its allies would be considerably higher should such moves occur in a country that, unlike Ukraine, is a member of NATO. As NSC members meet to choose a response, they should consider four different variables:

- How to send Moscow a strong signal of Western determination without provoking Russian escalation
- How to balance diplomatic initiatives with military measures that would make it possible to defend the Baltic states if [deterrence](#) fails
- How to manage discourse between the U.S. Congress and friendly foreign governments (especially those of NATO allies) while avoiding adding so many voices to the debate that decisions are delayed and policy loses focus
- Finally, how to develop effective public explanations of policy at a time when Russian propaganda—and not a few Western commentators—are blaming the Baltic states and NATO for the tensions

Background

The Baltic states' history is deeply intertwined with Russia. All three states fell under Russian rule in the 1700s, gained their independence after World War I, and remained that way until the [Soviet Union](#) invaded in 1940 and incorporated them into the USSR. The Baltic states' status as union republics gave them the constitutional right to secede from the USSR. For almost half

a century, that right was merely theoretical, but during 1990 and 1991, as the Soviet Union faltered, the three states became the first Soviet territories to exercise it. Each had seen the growth of new political movements opposed to Soviet rule during the [perestroika](#) era of the mid-1980s, a movement for political reform in the Soviet Communist Party. Although the Baltic states had initially declared independence in spring 1990, that independence was not fully realized until a year later, in August 1991, just four months before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Having regained independence, the Baltic states sought closer ties with the West. All three successfully pursued similar programs of political and economic reform, remaking themselves as democracies with booming market economies. They set their sights on membership in both NATO and the [European Union](#) in the 1990s and joined both organizations in 2004.

NATO membership was especially important to the Baltic states' security strategies. The military [alliance](#) had served for decades as the anchor of collective security between the United States and Western Europe, committing the United States to defend its European allies against a Soviet invasion during the [Cold War](#). The Baltic states saw the alliance as the best insurance policy against potential Russian aggression in the future. Russia objected to the states' entry into NATO, but not forcefully. Russia's relations with the West were largely cordial at this time, and, as part of what is informally called the [NATO-Russia Founding Act](#) of 1997, the alliance had declared it had no plans for permanent large-scale military installations on the territory of new members.

Russia's [annexation](#) of [Crimea](#) in February 2014, after protestors calling for closer ties with the West removed Ukraine's pro-Russia president from office, raised concern among NATO members about the potential for similar Russian actions in the Baltic states. Russia later held a [referendum](#) in which an overwhelming majority of Crimean voters chose union with Russia; NATO and EU members dispute the vote's legality. In the following months, conflict broke out between pro-Russia separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and the new Ukrainian government. Russia stationed troops along its Ukrainian border in response and has allegedly supported separatists and supplied them with arms, though the Kremlin denies doing so.

Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 convinced Western leaders they needed to better prepare for possible escalation by Moscow. In 2015, NATO governments agreed that all members, including the Baltic states, should increase defense spending. NATO has also significantly enlarged its military presence in the Baltic region, increasing air patrols and deploying ground troops in each of the Baltic states on continuous rotations.

The United States, for its part, has greatly increased funding for new support to NATO. In 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, President Barack Obama created the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), which bolsters U.S. military capabilities in Europe to support NATO's efforts in deterring Russian aggression. As of 2016, the ERI receives nearly [\\$800 million](#) in funding for [deterrence](#) initiatives but has requested \$3.4 billion for the 2017 fiscal year.

Baltic leaders took the lessons of the Crimea conflict to heart. They concluded that they needed to be able to respond quickly to the first signs of similar pressure from Russia against their own countries. That meant paying close attention to signs of cross-border support for Russian nationalists in their countries. NATO members have repeatedly emphasized their [Article 5 commitment](#) to Baltic members. Furthermore, they have warned Russia against a policy of pressure on NATO members similar to the policy it has pursued with the Crimean Peninsula.

Role of the United States

Because NATO is both a central institution of U.S. foreign policy and a major strategic asset, the United States sees any Russian military activity near the Baltic states as a challenge it needs to—in some fashion—meet. The United States has a strong interest in maintaining the security of its European allies and in sending a firm signal to Russia that it cannot threaten them without consequence. Yet no decision on supporting an ally in trouble is a simple one, especially when the opposing power is a nuclear-armed state with considerable military and economic might. Any escalation in the conflict could have high costs for both U.S. and NATO military personnel.

As a first step, the United States, along with its NATO allies, had to consider how severe the threat from Russia's actions was. Russian buildup near the Baltics had yet to constitute an armed attack that would justify invoking Article 5 of the [North Atlantic Treaty](#). However, against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing activity in Ukraine, the Baltic states sought strong signals

of U.S. resolve.

Second, the United States will need to carefully consider how to most effectively assist without unnecessarily escalating the conflict. If, on the other hand, NATO members hold off invoking Article 5, Western policymakers could have more flexibility. In either case, Baltic leaders and other NATO allies will seek strong signals of U.S. resolve, and any U.S. action seen as half-hearted under these circumstances could cause allies in Europe and beyond to question U.S. commitment to collective security.

Apart from the question of whether Article 5 applies, the United States has a variety of policy tools available in supporting the Baltic states. NSC members will need to examine the costs and benefits of those tools as well as ways to combine them. They could also advise taking none of the steps if they conclude U.S. interests are best served by staying out of the crisis.

Preparation and Role-Play

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[Instructions](#)

[Video: How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play](#)

Roles Overview

Print these [custom placards](#) for use during your simulation. If you need to edit them, make a copy to your Google Drive.

Roles

President

The president is the head of state and commander in chief of the U.S. Armed Forces. They preside over National Security Council (NSC) meetings and listens to the advice and information presented by others. The president is not expected to be an expert on any single subject, but instead draws on the expertise of the NSC to analyze options and choose what they feel is the best policy to advance U.S. interests.

The president's goals are to

- select one or more policy options after considering the opinions and recommendations of NSC members; and
- balance and promote U.S. interests, with an eye toward both immediate goals and long-term foreign policy strategy.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltics states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis?

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- What is the U.S. role in the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)? What importance does NATO have for U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. position in the world?
- How has U.S. policy been perceived in Russia since the end of the [Cold War](#)? What does this perception suggest about the potential implications of various policy options?
- Does the current situation in the Baltic states mandate consideration of military action by the United States or NATO?
- Does this crisis raise the prospect of a military confrontation between the United States and Russia?
- What is the role of [sanctions](#) in current and historical U.S. policy toward Russia?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including [unilateral](#) and [multilateral](#) responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in the Baltic region?

Vice President

The vice president must be ready at a moment's notice to assume the presidency if the commander in chief is unable to perform their duties. Vice presidents can play a relatively active role on the National Security Council (NSC), serving as a general advisor and freely advocating their own positions during meetings. In particular, the president may ask the vice president to serve as an independent voice, untethered to any of the agencies represented by other NSC participants. The president may also ask about the interaction between the issue at hand and the domestic political situation, including in Congress.

The vice president's goals are to

- provide advice to the president on any topic, including those overlooked by other NSC participants; and
- understand the range of views in Congress and work to build congressional and public support for the president's chosen approach.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltics states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does the situation in the Baltic states fit in the broader range of national security concerns facing the United States?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Russian actions in Europe, U.S. relations with Russia, and the U.S. role in the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)?
- What role do the media and public opinion play in U.S. policy toward its European allies and toward Russia?
- Does this crisis raise the prospect of a military confrontation between the United States and Russia? If so, how might various policy options affect the likelihood of such a confrontation?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis?

Chief of Staff

The chief of staff oversees the Executive Office of the President, which provides the president with support to govern effectively. This post has traditionally been home to many of the president's closest advisors. In National Security Council (NSC) meetings, the chief of staff ensures that the president has the necessary analysis on the full range of factors relevant to the case, including the U.S. political situation. They also guide the process of implementing and communicating presidential decisions.

The chief of staff's goals are to

- highlight the domestic implications of U.S. foreign policy choices; and
- develop strategies to carry out the president's policy and communicate it to U.S. and international audiences.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What is the U.S. role in the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)? What importance does NATO have for U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. position in the world?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Russian actions in Europe, on U.S. relations with Russia, and on the U.S. role in NATO?
- What role do the media and public opinion play in U.S. policy toward the Baltic states and toward Russia?
- How can the president best articulate a decision and communicate it to the American people and the world?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including [unilateral](#) and [multilateral](#) responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in the Baltic region?

National Security Advisor

The national security advisor (NSA) has a special role in crisis management, serving as the “honest broker” for the national security policy process. Although the president makes final decisions, the NSA is responsible for ensuring that they have all the necessary information, that a full range of viable policy options has been articulated, that the prospects for success and failure have been identified, that any legal issues have been addressed, and that all members of the National Security Council (NSC) have had the opportunity to contribute.

The national security advisor's goals are to

- facilitate the president's consideration of issues by keeping the NSC discussion on track and guiding it toward concrete policy options; and
- build trust as an honest broker among the other NSC participants.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What specific interests does the United States have in the Baltic states and in the maintenance of peace and security in the Baltics?
- Does the current situation in the Baltics mandate consideration of military action by the United States or the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)?
- Does this crisis raise the prospect of a military confrontation between the United States and Russia?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including [unilateral](#) and [multilateral](#) responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation?
- Where does the situation in the Baltic states fit in the broader range of national security concerns facing the United States?
- What are the most important factors for the president to balance when making a decision? What types of analysis would be most useful for other members of the National Security Council to present?

Secretary of State

The Department of State maintains the U.S. diplomatic presence around the world, conducting foreign relations and using an on-the-ground perspective to generate country-specific knowledge. As head of the department, the secretary draws on this knowledge to present an authoritative view of the United States' bilateral relationships, the relationships between foreign countries, and the behavior and interests of foreign governments.

The secretary of state's goals are to

- serve as the president's principal foreign policy advisor; and
- analyze how policy options will affect the interests, reputation, and relationships of the United States.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What specific interests does the United States have in its relationships with Russia, with the Baltic countries, and with its [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) allies in general?
- How has U.S. policy been perceived in Russia since the end of the [Cold War](#)? What does this perception suggest about the potential implications of various policy options?
- What is the range of views among Washington's European allies on Russia and its behavior in Ukraine and elsewhere? What do these views suggest about the potential upsides and challenges of coordinating a [multilateral](#) response to the crisis in the Baltic regions?
- How might the State Department's diplomatic efforts be required to support various policy options in this case, such as a military deployment, additional [sanctions](#), or internal mediation?
- Which countries, aside from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, are likely to be most interested in the situation in the Baltics? What is the nature of U.S. relations with those countries?
- How does the North Atlantic Treaty, especially its Article 5 obligations, affect U.S. policy options? How could the U.S. response to this conflict affect its credibility as a responsible treaty ally and its [bilateral](#) relationships with allies around the world?
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of launching an urgent diplomatic initiative, perhaps including visits by the secretary of state or other officials to the United Nations, NATO headquarters, or Moscow?

Secretary of Defense

The secretary of defense is the principal defense policy advisor to the president, under whose direction they exercise authority over the Department of Defense. In National Security Council (NSC) meetings, the secretary analyzes the security situation in the relevant region and explains the likely implications of U.S. military involvement, both for the immediate crisis and for the United States' overall strategic position.

The secretary of defense's goals are to

- understand the options for and feasibility of any military action, as well as its possible outcomes; and
- identify ways to prevent the deterioration of a crisis to the point where it mandates U.S. military intervention.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- Does the current situation in the Baltic states mandate consideration of military action by the United States or the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)?

- What are Russia's general military capabilities? How has Russia's military posture evolved in recent years? What do these circumstances suggest about the U.S. and NATO policy response in this case, particularly about situations that might bring U.S. or NATO forces into contact with Russian or Russian-sponsored ones?
- If the United States were to respond militarily to the situation in the Baltics, what should its goals be? How should it determine when the military mission has been completed?
- What is the history of U.S. military forces working as part of multilateral missions assembled by NATO? What lessons can be learned from this history?
- What military capabilities and constraints accompany the United States' membership in NATO? How might NATO allies be able to contribute to any military response to the crisis in the Baltic states?
- What would be the implications of a military deployment in the Baltic region, whether quick or extended, for U.S. military capacity in other parts of the world?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including unilateral and multilateral responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in the Baltic states?

Secretary of the Treasury

The Department of the Treasury carries out policy on issues related to the U.S. and global economies and financial systems. The secretary of the treasury, as head of this department, serves as one of the president's chief economic advisors. In National Security Council (NSC) meetings, they analyze the economic dimensions of foreign policy issues and weigh the potential impact of policy options on U.S. economic concerns, including growth, trade and investment, and the position of the U.S. dollar.

The secretary of the treasury's goals are to

- serve as a senior presidential advisor on economic policy; and
- determine how foreign policy options might affect the U.S. economy and financial system, the global economy, and economic relations between the United States and others.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case affect the U.S. economy?
- What are the basic characteristics of the Baltic states' economic trends? What kind of economic relationships do they have with Russia?
- What is the nature and scope of the U.S. economic relationship (including trade and investment) with the Baltics and Washington's European allies more broadly? What are the possible effects of a continued crisis on the U.S. and European economies?
- What is the nature and scope of the U.S. economic relationship (including trade and investment) with Russia? How might the crisis, and various U.S. responses to it, affect this relationship and the U.S. economy?
- What are the roles of sanctions and of foreign assistance in current and historical U.S. policy toward Russia? What are the potential implications of using such economic measures in response to the current crisis, for example, by imposing more sanctions, threatening to withhold aid, or granting additional aid?
- What are the economic costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) is the highest-ranking member of the U.S. military and the principal military advisor to the president, the secretary of defense, the National Security Council (NSC), and the Homeland Security

Council. The CJCS does not exercise command authority over U.S. troops. Instead, they work with the heads of the U.S. military services to provide advice to the president and other senior leaders.

The CJCS's goals are to

- serve as the president's military advisor on the NSC; and
- advise the president on specific military options and the corresponding risks, benefits, and implications.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- Does the current situation in the Baltic region mandate consideration of military action by the United States or the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)?
- If the United States were to respond militarily to the situation in the Baltic region, what should its goals be? How should it determine when the military mission has been completed?
- What is the history of U.S. military forces working as part of [multilateral](#) missions assembled by NATO? What lessons can be learned from this history?
- What are the military capabilities and interests of any states and nonstate groups in the Baltic region or nearby that are hostile to the United States?
- What would be the implications of a military deployment in the Baltic region, whether quick or extended, for U.S. military capacity in other parts of the world?
- What are Russia's general military capabilities? How has Russia's military posture evolved in recent years? What do these circumstances suggest about the U.S. and NATO policy response in this case, particularly about situations that might bring U.S. or NATO forces into contact with Russian or Russian-sponsored ones?
- What military capabilities and constraints accompany U.S. membership in NATO? How might NATO allies be able to contribute to any military response to the crisis in the Baltic region?

Attorney General

The attorney general is the head of the Department of Justice and the chief lawyer of the U.S. government. The department represents the United States in legal matters, including by prosecuting violations of federal law. In National Security Council (NSC) meetings, the attorney general gives the president advice and opinions on the legal aspects of policies under consideration.

The Attorney General's goals are to

- consider the legal elements and implications of U.S. foreign policy options; and
- ensure that any policies decided by the NSC are in compliance with domestic and international law.

Issues for Consideration

- What issues of U.S. and [international law](#) does the crisis in the Baltic states raise?
- What are the legal considerations surrounding potential deployment of U.S. military forces in or around the Baltics, whether unilaterally or as part of a [multilateral North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) mission? What are the roles of the president and Congress on this issue?
- Do any legal considerations surround the prospect of the United States providing economic assistance to Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania??
- In what ways have Baltic countries' citizenship laws affected their politics and society? How are these issues relevant to the current crisis?

- What are U.S. obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty and any other treaties or legal agreements relevant to the crisis?

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

The role of the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) is to advance U.S. foreign policy interests in the bodies and forums of the UN system. Reporting to the secretary of state, the permanent representative helps formulate and articulate the U.S. position on all political and security matters under discussion at the UN. At National Security Council (NSC) meetings, they outline policy steps available to the United States at the UN and advises NSC participants on the positions and actions of other UN member states.

The U.S. permanent representative to the UN's goals are to

- advise the president and secretary of state on the diplomatic actions the United States can or should take at the UN; and
- promote the United States' interests and values at the UN.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the major elements of the U.S.-Baltic states, U.S.-Russia, and U.S.-[North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) relationships? How have they changed over time? What do these factors suggest about obstacles and opportunities for U.S. action toward Baltic states?
- What role can or should the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) and its component parts play in this crisis? Is the crisis solely a domestic issue limited to the Baltic region or a matter of international peace and security?
- Should the United States call for an emergency session of the UN Security Council to address the situation in the Baltics? Why or why not?
- What are the implications of the fact that Russia holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council along with three members of NATO (the United States, France, and the United Kingdom)?
- How important is it for the United States and NATO to receive the backing of the UN Security Council for any military intervention in or around the Baltic region?
- What are the trade-offs raised by various potential policy options in this case?

Director of National Intelligence

The U.S. intelligence community consists of seventeen agencies and organizations that gather and analyze intelligence to help policymakers formulate and implement U.S. foreign policy. The director of national intelligence oversees this network of agencies. They focus on providing the latest relevant information to National Security Council (NSC) members and articulating the capabilities and interests of the intelligence community.

The director of national intelligence's goals are to

- provide complete, accurate, and up-to-date information to the NSC on the situation under discussion; and
- serve as the principal advisor to the president and the NSC on intelligence matters.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic region as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does the situation in the Baltic region fit in the broader range of national security concerns facing the United States?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including [unilateral](#) and [multilateral](#) responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in the Baltic region?
- Does the current situation in the Baltic states mandate consideration of military action by the United States or the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)?
- What are the military capabilities and interests of Russia, as well as any states and nonstate groups in the Baltic region or nearby that are or might become hostile to the United States?
- What are the primary interests, motivations, and goals of the major actors in this crisis? To what extent is it possible to know?
- What concerns might arise for U.S. national security from the backgrounds or activities of the Baltic or Russian leaders involved in the crisis? How should these concerns affect U.S. policy?
- What might be the strategic, economic, and diplomatic effects of a prolonged crisis and of various developments, such as a military confrontation between NATO forces and Russian or Russian-sponsored ones?

General Advisor to the President

The general advisor offers analysis and recommendations that are unconstrained by the interests of any department or agency. They are tasked with providing a comprehensive assessment of the situation at hand and ideas for policy options that serve U.S. interests.

The general advisor's goals are to

- understand the breadth of the issue and outline its stakes for the United States; and
- advise the president on the range of policy options proposed by all NSC members.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the major elements of the U.S.-Baltic and U.S.-Russia relationships? How have they evolved over time? What do the history and current state of these relationships suggest about obstacles and opportunities for U.S. action in this case?
- What is the U.S. role in the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)? What importance does NATO have for U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. position in the world?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Russian actions in Europe, U.S. relations with Russia, and the U.S. role in NATO?
- Does this crisis raise the prospect of a military confrontation between the United States and Russia? If so, how might various policy options affect the likelihood of such a confrontation?
- How does the North Atlantic Treaty, especially its Article 5 obligations, affect U.S. policy options? How could the U.S. response to this conflict affect its credibility as a responsible treaty ally and its [bilateral](#) relationships with allies around the world?
- Does the current situation in the Baltic states mandate consideration of U.S. or NATO military action?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States, including [unilateral](#) and [multilateral](#) responses to the crisis? What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in the Baltics?

Guide to the Memorandum

All National Security Council (NSC) members except the president will write a position memo before the role-play. You can find more details about writing position memos under Student Resources. The president will write a presidential directive after the role-play. More details about that are also under Student Resources.

What is a memorandum?

- A memo is a formal, succinct written message from one person, department, or organization to another. It is an important form of formal, written communication in the workplace. A memo is generally short, to the point, and free of flowery language and extraneous information. A memo is typically informative or decision-oriented and is formatted in a way that helps readers quickly grasp the main points.
- In the NSC, memos consider, coordinate, and articulate policy options. They help analyze, evaluate, advocate, and channel those policy options and decisions within the bureaucracy.
- Memos also function as historical record. Many memos related to NSC discussions and presidential decisions are filed in government archives. Some are later declassified and released to help people understand how policy was devised at a given time in U.S. history.

Guide to the Role-Play

- There is no right or wrong way to participate in a role-play, but the better prepared you are, the more likely you will be able to advance a position effectively, and the more you and your peers will get out of the experience.
- Be patient during the role-play. Do not hold back from sharing your perspective, but be sure to give others a chance to do the same.
- Where there are competing interests, make the judgment calls that you would make if you were a government official, as informed by your earlier consideration of potential trade-offs. Ensure that the consequences of various decisions are carefully weighed.

Round	Timing	Objectives	Procedural Notes
One:	2 to 3 minutes per participant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present initial positions to the president. 2. Investigate the nuances of the positions through questioning. 3. Clarify the central questions to be debated. 	Each participant presents their position statement. If time permits, the president may ask questions to understand each NSC member's position and bring out the essential questions they wish to debate.
Two	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify the obstacles, risks, opportunities, and threats. 2. Evaluate the various positions on their merits. 	This is the debate portion of the role-play, when participants can defend their recommendations against others' and identify potential areas of compromise agreement.
Three	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Narrow the options to a few comprehensive and well- focused strategies that the president prefers. 2. Provide the president with clear recommendations (from NSC members), perhaps as a consensus or through a vote. 3. Arrive at a final presidential decision. 	This round should start with the president's stating one to three preferred options to be fleshed out.

Wrap-up

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

[Instructions](#)

[Role-Play How-To Video](#)

The Debrief

After the debate and deliberation close, the president will announce his or her decision, to be later finalized in the form of a written presidential directive. If time permits, you will participate in a debrief following the president's announcement.

Be active in this debrief. The role-play might seem to be the most challenging part of the experience, but the debrief is equally important. It will reinforce what you learned during the role-play exercise and refine your analytical skills. It will also force you to step out of your role and to view the case from a personal perspective. You will have the opportunity to discuss any

challenges you encountered as you worked through the discussion with your peers and how you felt about the final presidential decision.

The debrief will close with a reflection on the complexities and challenges of crafting foreign policy. This should help clarify your understanding of what you learned and answer any lingering questions. This exercise will also assist you in completing your final assignment, a written reflection.

What Actually Happened

In July 2016, NATO held its biennial summit in Warsaw, Poland, issuing a communiqué that cited “Russia’s aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force.” Members agreed to deploy four new battalions to Poland and the Baltic states on a “persistent rotational basis.” The communiqué also highlighted recent increases in military spending by allies but noted that “there is still much work to be done,” a reflection of frustration, especially in Washington, at unequal contributions to allied security. Another meeting of the NATO-Russia Council was held after the summit; it again failed to make significant progress.

By the end of 2021, each country in the [alliance](#) had increased its defense spending from its 2014 level. [Eight NATO members \[PDF\]](#) including each of the Baltic states, had met the alliance-wide standard of allocating 2 percent of the GDP to defense.

The United States, for its part, has remained committed to NATO in the years since. Despite frequently criticizing NATO allies, the Donald Trump administration ultimately upheld its commitment to the alliance, and after taking office in 2021, President Joe Biden has stated that the U.S. commitment to the alliance remains “[unshakeable](#).” Baltic leaders have joined in those expressions of solidarity.

What Did the Decision Mean?

Tensions between NATO and Russia in the Baltic region remained high in the following years. NATO began conducting larger military exercises in the region to both train its forces and signal its resolve. Russia has responded in kind; in fall 2018, both NATO and Russia conducted their [largest exercises since the early 1980s](#) within months of each other.

However, fears of a Baltic country coming under threat have remained and gained renewed prominence in February of 2022 after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As the war continues, NATO members, especially in the Baltics, have voiced concern that the conflict could spill over or lead Putin to point his aggression toward them.

As they did after the [annexation of Crimea](#) in 2014, NATO members quickly reaffirmed their commitment to the alliance after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. NATO doubled the number of battle groups positioned along the alliance’s eastern flank from four to eight. Although the alliance has, to date, avoided steps that would lead it into direct conflict with Russia, many NATO members have also contributed billions of dollars’ worth of military assistance toward Ukraine’s defense. Even as the war has become more limited in its scope, with Russian forces focusing their efforts on the east of the country, the prospect of conflict extending beyond Ukraine’s borders and into a NATO country remains a point of grave concern for alliance members.

Was it a Good Idea?

The role of NATO in shaping relations between Russia and the West is a hotly debated topic. The decision in 2016 to strengthen the alliance’s forward posture renewed conversation. Some experts argue that NATO’s expanding presence isolates Russia from the rest of Europe and contributes to rising tensions. Russia characterizes the alliance as a direct threat to its interests and has used NATO’s expanding presence to partially justify its aggressive foreign policies in the past. Increasing activity close to Russian borders, some argue, further validated Russia’s fears about NATO.

On the other hand, many policymakers, especially those in member countries bordering Russia, argue that a changing NATO posture is a necessary response to secure the alliance against Russian aggression, regardless of what policies Putin could justify

with it. Many also contend that Putin's adversarial foreign policy would unfold regardless of NATO's actions. Often, those experts point to the fact that NATO members have made numerous attempts to diplomatically manage relations and ease Russian concerns over the alliance, with limited success. Moreover, many NATO members, especially the Baltic countries, point to Russia's war in Ukraine as evidence of the need to take the threat of Russian aggression seriously.

Ultimately, policymakers cannot be certain about how NATO's increasing presence in the Baltics shaped the course of events in the following years. Whether it was a necessary step to safeguard the alliance or a move that spurred greater Russian aggression will remain a fiercely debated topic for years to come.

Reflecting on the Experience

The following questions are proposed to guide the discussion in the in-class debrief. This is not an exhaustive list and may vary depending on how your role-play exercise unfolded. If your class or group does not hold a debrief, these questions will nonetheless help you reflect on the role-play and write your policy review memo:

- Which issues received adequate attention during the role-play? Which, if any, received excessive attention or were left unresolved?
- Did the group consider long-term strategic concerns, or was it able to focus only on the immediate issue and the short-term implications of policy options?
- Which U.S. interests did the group or the president prioritize in the presidential directive and why? Were you comfortable with this prioritization?
- What techniques did you use to convince others that your policy position was the best option? What were successful strategies employed by others?
- What were the most significant challenges to your position? Did any make you rethink or adjust your position?
- Did your points cause anyone else to change their arguments or position?
- What political, economic, and other issues arose that you had not previously considered?
- If you could go back, what would you have done differently in presenting and advocating your point of view?

The written reflection is your final assignment in the simulation. In the debrief discussion after the role-play, you and your peers went beyond the role you played and thought about the issue from a variety of perspectives. Now that the National Security Council discussion and debrief are behind you, you can consider whether you personally support your recommended policy given the full spectrum of arguments and considerations that arose. Shedding your institutional role and writing from a personal point of view, you will craft a policy review memo that outlines and reflects on the policy options discussed, incorporating and critiquing the president's decision where appropriate.

If you played the role of president in the simulation, your memo should still reflect your personal opinion. You can comment on the course of action you ordered as president, further justify it, write more extensively on the options you dismissed, or suggest and support alternate options.

No matter which role you played originally, take into account all you have learned. Your instructor or facilitator will want to see whether and how your understanding of the issue and of the policymaking process has evolved from that expressed in your position memo.

More details about the written reflection are available under Student Resources.

Student Resources

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

[Instructions](#) [How-To Video](#)

Reading List

Essential Resources

- Jonathan Masters, "[The North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#)," CFR.org Backgrounder, February 27, 2015.
- Jonathan Masters, "[The Russian Military](#)," CFR.org Backgrounder, September 28, 2015.
- "[What Are Economic Sanctions?](#)" World101 from the Council on Foreign Relations, May 12, 2023.
- "[What is Deterrence?](#)" World101 from the Council on Foreign Relations, May 24, 2023.
- [Remarks by President Obama at the Multilateral Meeting of Leaders of Baltic States](#) on September 3, 2014.
- [Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia](#) on September 3, 2014.
- Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers, "[NATO Refocuses on the Kremlin, Its Original Foe](#)," *New York Times*, June 23, 2015.
- Robin Emmott and Sabine Siebold, "[NATO Agrees to Reinforce Eastern Poland, Baltic States Against Russia](#)," Reuters, July 8, 2016.
- David Mardiste and Gederts Gelzis, "[Baltics Eye Flashpoints with Russia, Guard Against 'Green Men'](#)," Reuters, June 3, 2015.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

Additional Resources

- Daniel Arkin, "[Baltic States Fear Putin Amid Escalation in Ukraine](#)," NBC, September 2, 2014.
- Jeffrey Taylor, "[The Seething Anger of Putin's Russia](#)," *Atlantic*, September 22, 2014.
- Jeanne Park, "[The Perils of a New Cold War](#)," Interview with Dimitri Simes, Council on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2015.
- Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers, "[U.S. Is Poised to Put Heavy Weaponry in Eastern Europe](#)," *New York Times*, June 13, 2015.
- Matthew Luxmoore, "[Latvia Struggles with Restive Russian Minority Amid Regional Tensions](#)," Al Jazeera America, June 13, 2015.
- "[Baltics Face Up to the Shadows of History](#)," YouTube video, 4:00, posted by Financial Times, October 14, 2014.
- "[NATO's Readiness Action Plan](#)," YouTube video, 3:57, posted by NATO, July 1, 2015.

How to Conduct Research and Use Sources

Research and Preparation

- Draw on the case notes, additional case materials, and your own research to familiarize yourself with
 - the goals of the NSC in general and of this NSC meeting in particular;
 - the U.S. interests at stake in the case and their importance to national security;
 - your role and your department or agency, including its purpose and objectives in the government and on the NSC;

- the aspects of the case most relevant to your role;
- the elements that a comprehensive policy proposal on the case should contain; and
- the major debates or conflicts likely to occur during the role-play. You need not resolve these yourself, of course, but you will want to anticipate them in order to articulate and defend your position in the NSC deliberation.
- Set goals for your research. Know which questions you seek to answer and refer back to the case notes, additional readings, and research leads as needed.
- Make a list of questions that you feel are not fully answered by the given materials. What do you need to research in greater depth? Can your peers help you understand these subjects?
- Using the case materials, additional readings, and discussions with your peers, weigh the relative importance of the U.S. interests at stake in the case. Determine where trade-offs might be required and think through the potential consequences of several different policy options.
- Conduct your research from the perspective of your assigned role, rather than the particular perspective of the person who currently inhabits that office. Make sure to consider the full range of U.S. interests at stake in the case, whether diplomatic, military, economic, environmental, moral, or otherwise. This will help you strengthen your policy position and anticipate and prepare for debates in the role-play.
- Consider what questions or challenges the president or other NSC members might raise regarding the options you propose and have responses ready.

Sources

- Consult a wide range of sources to gain a full perspective on the issues raised in the case and on policy options. Seek out sources that you may not normally use, such as publications from the region(s) under discussion, unclassified and declassified government documents, and specialized policy reports and journals.
- Remember: Wikipedia is not a reliable source, but it can be a reasonable starting point. The citations at the bottom of each entry often contain useful resources.
- Just as policymakers tackle issues that are controversial and subject to multiple interpretations, so will you in your preparation for the writing assignments and role-play. For this reason, evaluate your sources carefully. Always ask yourself:
 - When was the information produced? Is it still relevant and accurate?
 - Who is writing or speaking and why? Does the author or speaker have a particular motivation or affiliation that you should take into account?
 - Where is the information published? Determine the political leanings of journals, magazines, and newspapers by reading several articles published by each one.
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - Does the author provide sufficient evidence for their analysis or opinion? Does the author cite reliable and impartial sources?
 - Does the information appear one-sided? Does it consider multiple points of view?
 - Is the language measured or inflammatory? Do any of the points appear exaggerated?
- Take note of and cite your sources correctly. This is important not just for reasons of academic integrity, but so that you can revisit them as needed.
- Ask your teacher which style they prefer you use when citing sources, such as Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Manual of Style, or Associated Press (AP).

How to Write a Position Memo

- The first memo everyone (except the president) writes is called a position memo. It is written from the perspective of your assigned role. It presents a set of policy options for consideration by the NSC and recommends one of them to the president. The recommendation, or position, outlined in this memo is the one you will present during the role-play. (Keep in mind you may change your position as a result of the role-play discussion.)

- The position memo will help your fellow NSC members consider the issue efficiently and facilitate decision-making by the president. Equally important, it will help you clarify your understanding of the case by forcing you to identify the essential facts and viable policy options.
- If you have been assigned a specific role, remember that you are writing from the point of view of the department, agency, or office you represent, and not directly mimicking the policies or opinions of the person currently in that office (unless your instructor says otherwise). If needed, return to your case role description to understand the interests and position of your institution as well as goals of your role. Using the perspective of your institutional position, you will outline a set of options to address the crisis. Make sure you take into account the pros, cons, and ramifications of each policy option as it pertains to your role, institution, and as it is informed by your reading of the case materials and further research. Also, anticipate critiques of your proposed policy and incorporate your response into the memo. Doing so will help you prepare for the role-play.

Note: If you are assigned the role of president, you will not write a position memo. Instead, you will write a two-page presidential directive (PD) at the conclusion of the role-play. You will address the PD, which will follow a memo format, to the NSC members and inform them of your final decision regarding the policy option or options to be implemented (see below).

If your teacher has chosen to assign you the role of general advisor to the president, you will not need to write the position memo from a particular institutional position. Instead, you will have the flexibility to approach the issue from your own perspective, incorporating a comprehensive assessment of the crisis into your argument.

Click [here](#) to see a sample of a position memo.

How to Write a Presidential Directive

The format of the presidential directive is simpler than that of a position memo. A directive contains a record of the policy option or options that the president has chosen as well as the accompanying orders to various parts of the government with details on how to carry out these decisions.

- Start with a short paragraph describing the purpose of the memo. Everyone you are writing to was in the NSC meeting, so only brief context is needed.
- Explain in numbered paragraphs the decisions you have made, why you have made them, and any details regarding how you want the decisions carried out.
- Explain the communications strategy for the decision, considering both relevant foreign governments and the public. Also, consider that you may wish to keep certain elements of the decision secret from the public.
- Include any additional details before you sign.
- Be sure to include all the information necessary for NSC members to understand and carry out your intentions.

Click [here](#) to see a sample presidential directive.

How to Prepare for Role-Play

During the simulated NSC meeting, you will meet to debate and discuss U.S. policy options in response to the issues outlined in the case. Consistent with the NSC's mission to advise the president, you should raise the issues that are most important for the president to consider. This will enable them to make the most informed decision on policy options. Though you may or may not agree with this decision, your responsibility as an NSC member is to provide the best possible analysis and advice from the perspective of your role.

Role-play Guidelines

1. Stay in your role at all times. (Keep in mind that your role refers to the perspective and duties of the agency or department you represent, and not the specific person currently holding office of the role.)
2. Follow the general protocol for speaking.
 1. Signaling to Speak
 1. The National Security Advisor (NSA) will administer the meeting and should decide on a speaking order. Wait to be called on by the NSA.
 2. If you would like to speak out of turn, signal to the NSA, perhaps by raising a hand or a placard, and wait until the NSA calls on you.
 2. Form of Speech
 1. All NSC members (like the president in the following example) can be addressed as Mr./Madam/Mx. President or simply President [last name]. Before you begin the role-play, share which title you would like to use, and make sure to respect the title your fellow NSC members choose to use as well.
 2. Do not exceed predetermined time limits. If you exceed these limits, the NSA will cut you off.
 3. Frame your comments with a purpose and stay on topic. Remember that you must advise the president so that they can reach a decision on a precise policy question.
 3. Listening
 1. Take notes while others are speaking.
 2. Refrain from whispering or conducting side conversations.
 3. Applause and booing are not appropriate. Your words will be the most effective tool to indicate agreement or disagreement.

How to Write a Written Reflection

Guidelines

- **Subject (one short paragraph):** Offer a brief statement about the significance of the issue as it relates to U.S. foreign policy and national security. Provide just enough information about the crisis so that the reader can understand the purpose and importance of your memo. Be sure to include an initial statement of whether you agree or disagree with the president's decision.
- **Options and analysis (one paragraph per option):** Present and analyze the options discussed during the debate, deliberation, or debrief. Discuss their drawbacks, benefits, and resource needs. Be sure to acknowledge any weaknesses or disadvantages of the proposed options.
- **Recommendation and justification (several paragraphs):** Identify and explain your preferred policy option or options in more detail. Here, you can explain why you personally favor one or more of the recommendations that you initially presented or the president chose, or different options entirely. If you choose to support the options you presented in your position memo, make sure to justify why you feel yours is still the best position.
- **Reflection (one to two paragraphs):** Discuss how your position and the presidential directive are similar; if they are not, discuss how they are different. Use this section to give your thoughts on what the president should have included in their directive, or what you would have done differently. Remember, this is from your point of view; you are no longer advocating on behalf of a department or agency.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a written reflection.

Russia and NATO in the Baltics in 2016 (NSC)

Educator Simulation Guide

Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

Case Overview

Set in July 2016. Since Russia's [annexation](#) of the Ukrainian peninsula of [Crimea](#) in 2014, the United States has debated how to best support the Baltic States, three small countries wedged between Russia and the Baltic Sea. Those states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—are fellow members of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#), which the United States is bound by treaty to help defend. Given Russia's willingness to openly flout the [sovereignty](#) of its neighbors and its increasingly aggressive military presence in the Baltic region, the United States worries that Russia could continue an expansionist policy.

Before the biennial NATO summit, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) will convene to determine a policy to address Baltic security that the United States will articulate at the gathering. As the NSC deliberates, it needs to consider the possibility that Russian actions in Ukraine could be replayed in the Baltics.

Decision Point

American policymakers need to decide how to support the Baltic states now that Russia has annexed [Crimea](#). Russia's willingness to openly flout the [sovereignty](#) of its neighbors leaves the United States worried Russia could continue an expansionist policy.

Underscoring that fear was Russia's increasingly aggressive military presence in the Baltic region. In the years before the [annexation](#) of Crimea, the territory around the Baltics had seen Russian military buildup, including increased submarine [patrols](#) around NATO territory, military drills, and air patrols. In April 2016, tensions flared after the White House [reported](#) that a Russian plane had flown "dangerously close" to a U.S. ship and a Polish plane in the Baltic Sea. In a separate incident later that month, a Russian fighter jet [came within one hundred feet](#) of an American reconnaissance plane over the Baltic Sea. During the following months, Latvia several times [identified](#) Russian military ships and aircraft near its waters and airspace.

The biennial NATO summit is scheduled to convene in Warsaw, Poland, in July of this year (2016). Because tensions with Russia in the Baltic region have been mounting, discussing the [alliance](#)'s eastern flank will occupy much of the summit's agenda. In advance of the meeting, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) will convene to determine a policy to address Baltic security that it will articulate at the summit. As the United States deliberates, it needs to consider that Russian actions in Ukraine—including the exploitation of a neighbor's internal divisions, the infiltration of special operations forces, a buildup of regular units on the border, and a potential Russian seizure of neighboring territory—could be replayed in the Baltics. The stakes for the United States and its allies would be considerably higher should such moves occur in a country that, unlike Ukraine, is a member of NATO. As NSC members meet to choose a response, they should consider four different variables:

- How to send Moscow a strong signal of Western determination without provoking Russian escalation

- How to balance diplomatic initiatives with military measures that would make it possible to defend the Baltic states if [deterrence](#) fails
- How to manage discourse between the U.S. Congress and friendly foreign governments (especially those of NATO allies) while avoiding adding so many voices to the debate that decisions are delayed and policy loses focus
- Finally, how to develop effective public explanations of policy at a time when Russian propaganda—and not a few Western commentators—are blaming the Baltic states and NATO for the tensions

Learning Goals

CFR Education extended simulations use a variety of pedagogical tools to create an effective, meaningful, and memorable learning experience for students that builds their global literacy. Students will develop crucial skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students will complete authentic assessments that feel relevant: instead of five-paragraph essays and book reports, students will write policy memos and participate in a role-play of a meeting of a foreign policy-making body. There are no right or wrong answers in actual policy deliberations, and there are none here, either; students will walk away from this experience with an appreciation for the complexity of policy questions.

In this simulation, students will learn about the National Security Council, as well as meeting these learning outcomes specific to this simulation:

- Students will understand the concept of collective security by considering the role of NATO in defending the Baltics.
- Students will consider the severity of the threat posed by the Russian military build up near the Baltics against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing action in Ukraine.
- Students will evaluate how the United States, along with its NATO allies, should assist Baltic leaders in countering the Russian threat.

Concepts and Issues

Concepts

- [Alliances](#)
- Multilateralism
- U.S. military options
- Balance of power
- [Nationalism](#)
- [Sovereignty](#)
- [Great power](#) rivalry

Issues

- [Collective defense](#) obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 5
- Post-[Cold War](#) expansion of the [European Union](#) and NATO and Russia's relations with those institutions
- Russia's political evolution and the legacy and effects of its action in Ukraine

Policy Options: Educator's Guide

This section presents context, potential benefits and drawbacks, and other information about the policy options outlined in the case that you may find helpful as you guide the role-play and assess students.

General Considerations

Because NATO is both a central institution of U.S. foreign policy and a major strategic asset, the United States sees any Russian military activity near the Baltic states as a challenge it needs to—in some fashion—meet. The United States has a strong interest in maintaining the security of its European allies and in sending a firm signal to Russia that it cannot threaten them without consequence. Yet no decision on supporting an ally in trouble is a simple one, especially when the opposing power is a nuclear-armed state with considerable military and economic might. Any escalation in the conflict could have high costs for both U.S. and NATO military personnel.

As a first step, the United States, along with its NATO allies, had to consider how severe the threat from Russia's actions was. Russian buildup near the Baltics had yet to constitute an armed attack that would justify invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing activity in Ukraine, the Baltic states sought strong signals of U.S. resolve.

Second, the United States will need to carefully consider how to most effectively assist without unnecessarily escalating the conflict. If, on the other hand, NATO members hold off invoking Article 5, Western policymakers could have more flexibility. In either case, Baltic leaders and other NATO allies will seek strong signals of U.S. resolve, and any U.S. action seen as half-hearted under these circumstances could cause allies in Europe and beyond to question U.S. commitment to collective security.

Apart from the question of whether Article 5 applies, the United States has a variety of policy tools available in supporting the Baltic states. NSC members will need to examine the costs and benefits of those tools as well as ways to combine them. They could also advise taking none of the steps if they conclude U.S. interests are best served by staying out of the crisis.

Military measures

If the United States believes the Baltic states' status as treaty allies calls for a strong show of support, it has a range of military options, such as immediately deploying U.S. rapid-reaction troops, mobilizing a larger multinational NATO contingent, and positioning naval forces off the coasts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. If NSC members choose to pursue military action, they will need to consider how U.S. and NATO forces can most effectively respond while avoiding unnecessary escalation. NATO forces could be deployed to reinforce the Baltic states' defenses unobtrusively, so as to not inflame Russia, or take a more visible approach that would signal firmness. An immediate deployment of rapid-reaction troops could quickly reinforce critical defenses, whereas a larger response would take longer to assemble but could send a more visible message of NATO solidarity. Additionally, deployments close to the Russian border could risk escalation, but stationing troops at a greater distance could both limit NATO's ability to react quickly and convey uncertain resolve.

A military response would send a strong message of resolve to Russia and potentially deter further escalation if the Kremlin decides the risk of open conflict with NATO is too great. Moreover, it would position troops to respond quickly and effectively if the situation escalated into open conflict. However, a military response is not a guaranteed deterrent: Moscow could respond by bolstering its own military presence, increasing the risk of a miscalculation or miscommunication that could ignite a large-scale conflict.

Diplomatic initiatives

Interest in solving this crisis peacefully is strong. To pursue a diplomatic resolution, NSC members could consider consultations between the United States and the Baltic states. The United States could also call for a meeting of NATO foreign or defense ministers, or even a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, which was created to address security issues between NATO and Russia but has met only intermittently since the 2014 [Crimea](#) crisis. The United States could also take a more direct approach, dispatching a high-level U.S. representative to Moscow—perhaps preceded by a U.S.-Russia presidential phone call. NSC members will need to decide whether diplomatic steps should be tried before military steps are taken or whether pursuing both steps in parallel would be more effective. They will also need to consider whether to seek concessions and what sort of concessions to seek: assurances of security in the Baltics, trust-building measures, or merely beginning talks.

Economic measures

NSC members could also choose to impose economic [sanctions](#) on Russia to signal Western opposition to Russia's actions. Sanctions would reduce the risk of direct military confrontation but could be interpreted by NATO allies as a weak show of support. Moreover, sanctions would not necessarily compel Moscow to act. Sanctions played a large role in Western strategy during the confrontation over the Crimean Peninsula but ultimately have had no effect on Russia's involvement in that country. Moscow has also used the sanctions as a tool to inflame anti-Western sentiment. However, combined with a fall in oil prices, sanctions significantly weakened Russia's economy in 2014. Although Russia has largely recovered from that downturn, new and more severe sanctions could have a stronger effect on its actions. As they were during the [annexation](#) of Crimea, sanctions can be applied in many forms: against individual leaders, particular companies, or entire sectors of the economy.

Running the Simulation

CFR Education extended simulations are project-based learning activities. Project-based learning (PBL) [leads to](#) better learning outcomes and improves skills, and is more fun than traditional instructional methods. The website that students will navigate throughout the simulation is divided into several parts:

In the **NSC Guide**, students will learn about the National Security Council, the body they will be simulating. Included are details on its history, how it works, who its major players are, and more. There is also a video interview with experts who have served on the body.

In the **Case Notes**, students dive into the actual situation they will be trying to solve in their simulation. At the beginning is a clear decision point: the question that students will debate during the role-play. This is followed by detailed background material and a discussion of the role that the United States plays.

Preparation and Role-Play includes details on the various roles students could take on, guidelines for the memorandum they will write (the student playing the role of president has a slightly different task), as well as an outline of how the discussion will flow during the role-play.

The **Wrap-Up** is an important part of the project and includes reflection questions and guidelines for reflecting in a class discussion and in a second memorandum. For historical cases, this section also includes a short description of how the decision point was addressed by policymakers in real life.

The simulation also includes **Student Resources**, which include a reading list to support research, additional directions and exemplars for writing assignments, and other tips students may find helpful.

Tips for Role-Play

Once students have read the simulation and prepared their position memos, here is how we recommend structuring the role-play:

Round	Timing	Objectives	Procedural Notes
One	2 to 3 minutes per participant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present initial positions to the president. 2. Investigate the nuances of the positions through questioning. 3. Clarify the central questions to be debated. 	Each participant presents their position statement. If time permits, the president may ask questions to understand each NSC member's position and bring out the essential questions they wish to debate.
Two	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarify the obstacles, risks, opportunities, and threats. 2. Evaluate the various positions on their merits. 	This is the debate portion of the role-play, when participants can defend their recommendations against others' and identify potential areas of compromise agreement.
Three	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Narrow the options to a few comprehensive and well-focused strategies that the president prefers. 2. Provide the president with clear recommendations (from NSC members), perhaps as a consensus or through a vote. 3. Arrive at a final presidential decision. 	This round should start with the president's stating one to three preferred options to be fleshed out.

Tips for the National Security Advisor

In Round 1, call on everyone for their opening statements, keeping to a strict time limit—if students have more to say, they can say it in Round 2. The president doesn't have a specific time limit, but you should keep things moving by not letting the president get bogged down on one issue or policy option.

In Round 2, students do not need to follow a prescribed speaking order; you can call on them as they raise their placards. Work to include everyone and prevent anyone from dominating. As debate goes on, remind students they can change their minds. If it will help move things along, help students see when they are agreeing with each other without realizing it. Feel free to pose questions or propose discussion topics if you feel that certain issues are not receiving adequate consideration. Ultimately, it's up to you to judge when Round 2 has run its course and it is time to move on to Round 3. You will want to move on when all policy options have been discussed and all of the president's questions have been answered. The room does not need to come to a consensus—every option just needs to have a fair airing.

In Round 3, ask students to make a final case for their positions. If, during the course of the discussion, some students seem to have coalesced into blocs, you could ask one student to present on behalf of the bloc. If consensus seems possible, you could work toward it; if not, just make sure each option has been clearly presented to the president. Remember, the NSC is not democratic and is an advisory, not decision-making, body. There is no vote, and the president does not need to choose the most popular option.

Tips for the President

Before Round 1, review all the position memos, if you can. During Round 1, as students are presenting their opening statements, you can ask questions to clarify or help draw out the differences between one policy option and another. Try not to get too deep in the weeds, though—that is what Round 2 will be for.

In Round 2, you can take a more active role. If you have concerns about a policy option, ask questions; if some policy options seem stronger than others, say so. If an element of the issue is not being discussed, raise it.

In Round 3, once you have heard all the policy options, it is all down to you. You should choose whichever policy option you think is best, or combine the strongest elements of several different options. Remember, the NSC is not democratic and is an advisory, not decision-making, body. There is no vote, and you do not need to choose the most popular option. Your decision must be made and announced before the wrap-up discussion, although the written presidential directive can come later.

Tips for Online Classes

We suggest conducting the role-play in three rounds, and that three-round structure is a helpful way to approach chunking the role-play for online learning as well. You can conduct each round synchronously or asynchronously.

In round one, participants present their positions.

- In a synchronous meeting, you can go through opening statements using videoconferencing software, allowing for live clarifying questions.
- However, this is probably the easiest round to conduct asynchronously. You could disseminate positions in writing by having participants share their position memos or write a summary for the purpose of the role-play. You could also have participants record a video of themselves delivering their opening statement and disseminate it for all to watch.

In round two, participants debate the various policy options.

- In a synchronous setting, you can simply run a full-class discussion for round two. If you need more structure or want to prod reticent participants, consider starting by randomly assigning students to breakout rooms, assigning each breakout room one policy option. After working through pros and cons, representatives from each breakout room can share out to kick off the general discussion.
- In an asynchronous setting, consider a discussion forum, with a thread for each policy option. Coach the National Security Advisor and President to be active in the forum, raising questions and responding to points.

In round three, debate begins to coalesce around the policy options that the president favors.

- This round can be approached similarly to round two, but the president should set the topics for breakout rooms or forum threads.

Flashpoints

To add challenge to the role-play, partway through the discussion throw in one of the following flashpoints—additional hypothetical developments that fit within the case’s existing decision point—or create your own. These flashpoints are intended to stimulate debate by making students think on their feet and reconsider their initial policy preferences.

1. Latvian soldiers enforcing [martial law](#) in a border village fire on a group of Russian soldiers, who return fire. Initial reports indicate that two soldiers on each side are killed, along with five Latvian civilians. The Latvian government acknowledges that its forces fired first but insists that the Russian soldiers had crossed the border into Latvia. The Russian government denies this, reiterating earlier statements that its forces are conducting routine exercises a reasonable distance away from the border. Photographs appear to show that other Russian soldiers moved the bodies of their fallen comrades after they were killed. Latvia’s prime minister immediately announces on television that “Russia’s aggression will meet with a forceful response from Latvia and our NATO allies.”
2. In a widely covered speech, the prime minister of a European nation—a NATO ally and a country which has received substantial investment and economic support from Russia in recent years—articulates his view that “Latvia has brought these problems upon itself.” He announces that he will take “all steps at my disposal” to prevent NATO from undertaking a military response to the crisis. He pledges to visit Moscow in the coming days “to discuss with the Russian government how its concerns could be addressed through sensible policy changes in Latvia.”

3. Following urgent consultations with senior officials at the Russian foreign ministry, the U.S. ambassador in Moscow reports that Russia would like to quietly explore a deal. Russia would gradually tone down its rhetoric toward Latvia, reduce its military presence near the border and in the airspace and seas around the Baltics, and ensure that any forces or operatives loyal to Russia close their command center in Latvia and cease provocative activities (though Russia does not admit that these men are Russian soldiers). In exchange, the United States would withdraw NATO personnel from Latvia and cancel NATO's summer military exercises in the Baltic states. It would also accept the status quo in Ukraine (most notably, Russian control over [Crimea](#)) and refrain from attempting to expand NATO membership or increase NATO's military presence in its eastern European member states, all for an indefinite period. Most critically, the United States would publicly call on—and diplomatically pressure—Latvia to end martial law and accord significant autonomy to areas populated heavily by ethnic Russians. These steps would not be announced publicly so that both Washington and Moscow could deny they were linked.

After introducing a flashpoint, you might want to help students refocus their discussion by considering critical questions such as these:

1. Who is affected by this event or development, and how?
2. Is there any uncertainty about what has taken place? How credible is the report?
3. Does this event or development affect the feasibility of any policy options? If so, how?
4. Does this event or development affect the desirability of any policy options? If so, how?

Case Assessment

1. What is the security situation in the Baltic states as presented in this case? What kind of threat, if any, does the situation pose to U.S. national security?
2. What is the historical relationship between Russia and the Baltic states? How has this history shaped the Baltic states' domestic and foreign policies in recent decades?
3. What is the nature of U.S. involvement in the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) and what is NATO's importance to U.S. foreign policy? How can NATO affect U.S. security policy and military action?
4. How do recent events in Ukraine inform the security of the Baltic states?

NSC Assessment

1. What are the four categories of tools available to U.S. leaders crafting foreign policy, and what is the range of specific tools in each?
2. What is the interagency process and how is it related to the NSC system?
3. What are the various committees in the NSC system and how do they interact to drive U.S. policymaking and implementation?
4. What are the responsibilities of the national security advisor (NSA)?
5. What are the major departments and agencies involved in the U.S. national security and foreign policy-making process? What are their responsibilities?

Writing Assignments

Each CFR Education extended simulation involves writing assignments that help students think through policy options and reflect on their learning experience.

In NSC cases, there are three types of writing assignments.

- Before the role-play, everyone but the president writes a position memo.
- After the role-play, the president writes a presidential directive.
- As part of the wrap-up, everyone writes a written reflection.

Simulations (on the student-facing side) have instructions for written assignments, and samples for each of these writing exercises. You can also find sample rubrics below.

Samples:

- [NSC position memo](#)
- [NSC presidential directive](#)
- [NSC written reflection](#)

Rubric

Below are sample rubrics for your use in assessing the writing students will do as part of this extended simulation.

These are single-point rubrics. Jennifer Gonzalez, who writes the blog [Cult of Pedagogy](#), has a great [explainer](#), but the bottom line is that single-point rubrics are relatively easy for students to digest but still have all the advantages of giving structure to instructors' feedback.

NSC Position Memo Rubric

CONCERNS

What needs improvement

CRITERIA

What is expected

ADVANCED

What is excellent

Subject and Background paragraphs

- Briefly explains the significance of the issue in the context of U.S. foreign policy
- Clearly identifies the central question
- Does not summarize the case

Objectives bullet points

- Lists several objectives of the department the writer represents
- Objectives are grounded in knowledge of the role of the department
- Objectives help to shape the analysis of options described in the next section

Options and Analysis paragraphs

- Lists all options mentioned in the case
- Lists other potential options
- Analysis considers advantages, disadvantages, and trade-offs

Recommendation and Justification paragraphs

- Clearly identifies a preferred option or options
- Supports the choice with appropriate analysis
- Explains why other options are less preferable
- Written with the president as the intended audience

CONCERNS

What needs improvement

CRITERIA

What is expected

ADVANCED

What is excellent

Purpose

- Provides context for the memo
- Is succinct

Decisions

- Clearly states the decisions made
- Explains the decisions convincingly
- Details how to implement them

Communications strategy

- Contains an effective strategy for relevant foreign governments
- Contains an effective strategy for the public

NSC Written Reflection Rubric

CONCERNS

What needs improvement

CRITERIA

What is expected

ADVANCED

What is excellent

Subject paragraph

- Is brief
- Places the issue in the larger context of U.S. foreign policy
- Clearly states whether the writer agrees or disagrees with the president's decision

Options and Analysis paragraph

- Discusses each option that came up during the role-play in discrete paragraphs
- Weighs the advantages and disadvantages of each option
- If options from the position memo are discussed, those options contain additional analysis

Recommendation and Justification paragraph

- Makes a clear recommendation based on the writer's personal position
- Supports the recommendation effectively

Reflection paragraph or paragraphs

- Reflects on and critiques the president's decision
- Is written from a personal point of view, not that of the assigned role

Downloadable rubrics are available here:

- [NSC position memo](#)
- [NSC presidential directive](#)
- [NSC written reflection](#)