

[Simulation](#) from [Terrorism](#) and [Foreign Policy](#)

Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2017 (NSC)

Set in February 2017. A Boko Haram attack threatens the stability of Nigeria, as the country seeks U.S. aid.

Case Overview

Set in February, 2017. Radical Islamist movement [Boko Haram](#) is waging an [insurgency](#) in northeast Nigeria estimated to have killed at least twenty thousand people in recent years. The insurgency threatens the stability of Nigeria, a major oil producer and Africa's most populous country. Nigerian security forces have made some progress against Boko Haram, but humanitarian and media organizations have reported extensive human rights abuses by these forces, including the killing of civilians. Nigeria's president has requested that the United States sell heavy military equipment to the country. However, a U.S. law, called the [Leahy Amendment](#), prohibits military assistance to foreign militaries credibly accused of human rights abuses unless the foreign government takes action—something Nigeria's government has yet to do. National Security Council (NSC) members need to advise the president on whether to authorize the sale despite legal and human rights concerns.

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.

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.

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

Since 2009, [Boko Haram](#), a radical Islamist group, has fought against the secular government of Nigeria. In summer 2014, then President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan asked the United States to authorize his country's purchase of U.S.-manufactured aircraft to help in its fight against the group. President Barack Obama rejected the sale. This was because U.S. law prohibited the transfer of heavy military equipment to Nigeria, partly because of human rights abuses by Nigeria's security services.

The legislation in question, commonly called the [Leahy Amendment](#), forbids U.S. military assistance to foreign forces credibly accused of human rights abuses. It requires that the government of the accused group investigates and responds to the charges. International humanitarian organizations and the international press have reported extensive abuses by Nigerian forces. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that these abuses drive public support for Boko Haram. Observers have estimated that

during certain periods the security services have killed as many civilians as Boko Haram. Even so, the Nigerian government largely dismissed the charges and conducted few credible investigations.

Muhammadu Buhari, who replaced Goodluck Jonathan as president in 2015, claimed he would restore discipline within the military. In September 2015, he promised to issue new rules of engagement designed to protect civilians. However, these steps appear to have had little practical consequence. In 2015, the human rights organization [Amnesty](#) International began issuing reports every year documenting ongoing human rights abuses. These reports included details about unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture.

Accountability for abuses by the military remained elusive. The government refrained from launching a formal investigation into a 2014 incident in which the army killed some 640 recaptured prison escapees alleged to be members of Boko Haram. In December 2015, the army killed several hundred members of a Shiite sect known as the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN). The army claimed that they had attacked the motorcade of the chief of army staff. A 2016 inquiry found the Nigerian army responsible for the killings. It also condemned the IMN for provoking the attack, and called for all involved parties to be prosecuted. Nigeria's justice system did not take any further legal action, however.

Decision Point—Set in February 2017

Despite Nigeria's military abuses, in 2016, the United States considered selling 12 Super Tucano planes—light aircraft used for [surveillance](#)—to Nigeria. However, on January 17, 2017, the same day the Obama administration planned to notify Congress of the aircraft sale to Nigeria, the Nigerian air force accidentally bombed a [refugee](#) camp killing more than 100 people. As a result, in one of his last decisions as U.S. President, Obama stalled the sale of the aircraft to Nigeria. On February 15th, during a telephone call with President Buhari, President Donald Trump indicated that he would take another look at the proposed sale.

The National Security Council (NSC) is meeting to discuss the sale. NSC members need to decide whether Nigeria's economic and strategic importance to the United States overrides legal and ethical concerns about ongoing human rights abuses. Specifically, the NSC should decide whether to advise the new president to recommit to the sale of the aircraft and/or to consider other forms of military aid in the future. The NSC should also consider whether the prospect of a closer [bilateral](#) military relationship could incentivize Nigeria to investigate claims of human rights abuses and take necessary steps to end them.

Background

In 2016, Nigeria had Africa's largest population, [186 million](#) and growing, especially in urban areas. The United Nations predicts that by 2050 Nigeria will be the third most populous country in the world.

The country has more than 350 ethnic groups and languages and a population evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. Because of this, Nigeria has dealt with weak national identity. In 1967, Nigeria's [Biafra](#) region attempted to secede, sparking a [civil war](#) that lasted until 1970. After the war, a generation of military rule left Nigeria's [democratic institutions](#) fragile. Democratic, civilian government was restored in 1999. However, elite leaders continued to rule Nigeria as they did under the military, organizing themselves into political parties based on personalities rather than issues.

Nigeria has Africa's largest economy and is the continent's largest oil producer. Since the 1970s, most of the country's revenue has come from oil sales. The country also has immense reserves of other natural resources, including natural gas, gold, and coal. Despite this wealth, there is vast economic inequality. Some elites are spectacularly wealthy while most Nigerians have remained poor. By 2016, Nigeria was among the poorest, least developed, and most unequal countries in the world. The 2015–16 collapse of oil prices impoverished the country even further, and greatly reduced the government's ability to respond to the security and humanitarian challenges of [Boko Haram](#).

Against this backdrop of inequality, weak democratic institutions, and fragmented national and religious identities, Boko Haram was born. The Islamist group was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Nigeria's northern Borno State in 2002. Boko Haram rejected the secular state, Western education, and traditional Nigerian elites. (Boko, meaning book in Hausa—one of

Nigeria's major languages—refers to Western education and values; haram refers to practices and beliefs forbidden by Islam. The group's leaders call it by other names, which vary and are rarely used.) Although Boko Haram began as a primarily non-violent group, over time it became large, influential, and violent.

In 2009, Boko Haram launched a rebellion in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Nigerian security services responded brutally, killing over eight hundred people, destroying mosques, and murdering Yusuf in cold blood, an episode that went viral on social media. Boko Haram then went underground but reemerged in 2011 with much more violent leadership. The new leaders advocated practices and principles similar to those of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Boko Haram was especially violent against Muslims who accepted the secular Nigerian state. Boko Haram routinely cited seventh-century beliefs to characterize them as “apostates” who had turned away from Islam, a charge that, according to these beliefs, justifies their execution.

In increasingly sophisticated operations, Boko Haram conducted widespread kidnappings of women and girls, including the [Chibok schoolgirls](#). This incident became well known internationally. It funded itself through ransoms and bank robberies. The group armed itself by raiding government armories, some of which had likely been deliberately left unlocked. It staged devastating attacks on government jails and prisons to free captured fighters.

As of 2017 Boko Haram operated primarily in northeastern Nigeria. However, it conducted operations in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, and in Kano, the largest city in the north. Its factions have also carried out operations in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger in the Lake Chad basin. Credible estimates hold that in the six-year period leading up to February 2017, Boko Haram killed over forty thousand people.

Support for Boko Haram has been difficult to judge. Past polling has indicated that about 10 percent of Nigeria's population viewed the group favorably. However, Boko Haram did not advance a political or economic program. Unlike other radical Islamist movements, Boko Haram showed little interest in the United States. It attacked no Western facilities. Nevertheless, observers voiced concerns that Boko Haram could provide other radical jihadi Islamist movements opposed to Western interests access to sub-Saharan Africa.

In February and March 2015, then President Goodluck Jonathan launched an offensive against Boko Haram. Jonathan employed Chadian, Nigerian, and Nigerien troops supported by South African-led mercenaries. The offensive dislodged Boko Haram from most of the territories it had occupied but did not destroy it. Nigerian authorities were unable to reestablish firm control of those areas. As a result, Boko Haram appeared to continue moving about freely.

In the March 2015 Nigerian presidential election, Muhammadu Buhari defeated Jonathan on an anticorruption platform and a promise to destroy Boko Haram. After his inauguration, Buhari approved corruption investigations of numerous high-level officials of the Jonathan administration as well as senior military officers. Despite these investigations, Nigeria's overall corruption status has remained unchanged since the election.

Buhari also pursued military effort against Boko Haram but was unable to successfully eradicate the group. The Nigerian military conducted a number of momentarily successful operations against the [terrorist](#) group in 2015, and the number of monthly deaths in Nigeria [declined](#). Buhari repeatedly claimed that the struggle against Boko Haram was all but over. But, despite this apparent initial success, Boko Haram remained a serious threat.

Role of the United States

Policymakers in Washington have usually seen Nigeria as the most important U.S. partner in Africa. Successive U.S. presidents have supported Nigeria's evolution toward democracy. This support comes not only because of the U.S. belief in democratic [governance](#) but also because of Nigeria's size, diversity, and potential to be a helpful model for other African countries. Democratic failure in Nigeria could be a setback to the development and maintenance of democratic [norms](#) that have facilitated cooperation on various issues among many African countries.

U.S. goals in Nigeria in this case included continued evolution toward democratic governance, [rule of law](#), and respect for human rights. Another U.S. priority was economic development, which would likely promote political stability. In addition,

Washington wanted to fight the expansion of militant [terrorist](#) movements. The United States has traditionally not had much leverage over the Nigerian government because of Nigeria's size and oil wealth. Going into 2017, an economic crisis caused by falling oil prices and the threat of [Boko Haram](#) could provide Washington with greater negotiating advantage.

The [Leahy Amendment](#) forbids the U.S. State and Defense Departments from providing military assistance to foreign militaries if the U.S. secretary of state or defense has credible information that those groups have committed severe human rights violations. Accordingly, three options were possible in responding to Buhari's request for U.S. authorization to acquire the Super Tucano planes:

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Nigeria [bilateral](#) relationship? How has it changed over time?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States?

- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria’s request for equipment? How is the [Leahy Amendment](#) relevant in this case?
- How does Nigeria’s evolving religious makeup facilitate or explain the rise and persistence of Boko Haram? What other factors contribute to Boko Haram’s rise and the Nigerian government’s efforts to prevent it?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States?
- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria’s request for equipment? How is the [Leahy Amendment](#) relevant in this case?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Boko Haram, the Nigerian security services, U.S.-Nigeria relations, and the Leahy Amendment in general?
- If the U.S. president decided to grant Nigeria’s request, how would the White House need to work with Congress to modify or satisfy Leahy Amendment restrictions?
- How do the media and public opinion affect U.S. policy toward Nigeria and, in particular, toward the actions of the Nigerian security services fighting Boko Haram?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Boko Haram, the Nigerian security services, U.S.-Nigeria relations, and the [Leahy Amendment](#) in general?
- How do the media and public opinion affect U.S. policy toward Nigeria and, in particular, toward the actions of the Nigerian security services fighting Boko Haram?
- If the U.S. president decided to grant Nigeria's request, how would the White House need to work with Congress to modify or satisfy Leahy Amendment restrictions?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response? How should they be prioritized?
- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria's request for equipment? How is the [Leahy Amendment](#) relevant in this case?
- Have U.S. leaders ever considered any transaction with Nigeria that might involve the Leahy Amendment?
- What are the immediate security risks of the policy options being considered in this case? For example, what would be the implications or consequences of equipment sold to Nigeria by the United States being used to conduct human rights abuses?
- What are the most important factors for the president to balance when making a decision?
- Research the performance of past [national security advisors](#) and the ways in which they managed the [interagency](#) process. Which advisors and policy processes have been considered especially successful or unsuccessful, and why?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Nigeria [bilateral](#) relationship? How has it changed over time?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response? How should they be prioritized?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram? How, if at all, might they help resolve, exacerbate, or otherwise shape the current situation?
- What countries have requested U.S. assistance that prompted deliberations relevant to the [Leahy Amendment](#)? How might these examples affect the U.S. decision in this case?
- How, if at all, do events in [Biafra](#) relate to U.S. concerns about stability and security in Nigeria?
- What kinds of potential effects might various U.S. policy options have on Nigerians? How, if at all, should the president consider these effects when making a policy decision in this case?
- How is Abuja likely to react if Washington declines to sell it the requested equipment? How might this potential reaction inform the NSC recommendation in this case?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States?

- What are the immediate security risks of the policy options being considered in this case? For example, what would be the implications or consequences of equipment sold to Nigeria by the United States being used to conduct human rights abuses?
- What is the state of military relationships among the United States and other countries involved in this case, which include Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Benin, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and others? How might a U.S. acceptance or refusal of Nigeria's equipment request affect these relationships?
- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria's request for equipment? How is the [Leahy Amendment](#) relevant in this case?
- What military capabilities does Nigeria currently use in the fight against Boko Haram? Why might Nigeria request attack helicopters and other military [materiel](#) from the United States?
- How have past efforts by Nigerian security services to fight Boko Haram, including by rescuing hostages, played out? What do these results mean for the U.S. policy response in this case?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United 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 Nigeria as presented in this case, and [Boko Haram](#) specifically, threaten the U.S. economy and the economies of U.S. allies?
- What are the chief characteristics of Nigeria's economy? What economic goals are Nigeria's leaders pursuing today?
- What role does oil play in Nigeria's economy? How, if at all, do Boko Haram activity and other elements of Nigerian instability affect the oil industry in Nigeria and therefore, Nigeria's economy?
- What interests does the United States have in the economic stability and growth of Nigeria and its neighbors? What, if anything, do these interests suggest about the policy options in this case?
- Does the United States import oil from Nigeria? Do any U.S. allies? More broadly, how do Nigerian exports (and any disruptions to them) affect international oil markets and, in turn, the U.S. economy?
- How do Boko Haram's attacks affect Nigeria's economy? For example, what is the role of local markets in Nigeria's society and economy? What are the effects of their closures?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States?
- What is the state of military relationships among the United States and other countries involved in this case, which include Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Benin, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and others? How might a U.S. acceptance or refusal of Nigeria's equipment request affect these relationships?
- What military capabilities does Nigeria currently use in the fight against Boko Haram? Why might Nigeria request attack helicopters and other military [materiel](#) from the United States?
- What are the immediate security risks of the policy options being considered in this case? For example, what would be the implications or consequences of equipment sold to Nigeria by the United States being used to conduct human rights abuses?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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

- What is the nature of the U.S.-Nigeria [bilateral](#) relationship? How has it changed over time?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response? How should they be prioritized?
- What position do UN member states, particularly those on the UN Security Council, take on Nigeria's fight against [Boko Haram](#)? How are these governments likely to react to various policy responses by the United States?
- What has been the role of the United Nations and its component parts in the fight against Boko Haram? What has this role been in dealing with human rights abuses by UN member governments? What role could or should the United Nations play in addressing the current crisis?
- What countries have requested U.S. assistance that prompted deliberations relevant to the [Leahy Amendment](#)? How might these examples affect the U.S. decision in this case?

- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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 U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response? How should they be prioritized?
- Have U.S. leaders ever considered any transaction with Nigeria that might involve the [Leahy Amendment](#)?
- What countries have requested U.S. assistance that prompted deliberations relevant to the Leahy Amendment? How might these examples affect the U.S. decision in this case?
- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria's request for equipment? How is the Leahy Amendment relevant in this case?
- If the U.S. president decided to grant Nigeria's request, how would the White House need to work with Congress to modify or satisfy Leahy Amendment restrictions?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the 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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- Where does Boko Haram fit into the broader context of national security concerns facing the United States? How should this analysis shape your consideration of policy options in this case?

- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria's request for equipment? How is the [Leahy Amendment](#) relevant in this case?
- How does Nigeria's evolving religious makeup facilitate or explain the rise and persistence of Boko Haram? What other factors contribute to Boko Haram's rise and the Nigerian government's efforts to prevent it?
- What are the primary interests, motivations, and goals of the major actors in this crisis? What factors drive potential responses to it?
- How, if at all, do events in [Biafra](#) relate to U.S. concerns about stability and security in Nigeria?
- How have past efforts by Nigerian security services to fight Boko Haram, including by rescuing hostages, played out? What are the implications for the U.S. policy response in this case?
- What are the immediate security risks of the policy options being considered in this case? For example, what would be the implications or consequences of equipment sold to Nigeria by the United States being used to conduct human rights abuses?

Secretary of Energy

The secretary of energy leads the Department of Energy, which carries out U.S. policy on energy, environmental, and nuclear issues. In National Security Council (NSC) meetings, the secretary must consider the energy-related dimensions of foreign policy issues, any energy-related tools that might form part of the U.S. response, and the implications of policy decisions for the American energy supply and environment.

The secretary of energy's goals are to

- formulate and evaluate energy-related measures as part of policy options; and
- gauge the implications of foreign policy decisions on U.S. energy security and environmental concerns.

Issues for Consideration

- How does [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Nigeria [bilateral](#) relationship? How has it changed over time?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally?
- What role does oil play in Nigeria's economy? How, if at all, do Boko Haram activity and other elements of Nigerian instability affect the oil industry in Nigeria and, therefore, Nigeria's economy?
- Does the United States import oil from Nigeria? Do any U.S. allies? More broadly, how do Nigerian exports (and any disruptions to them) affect international oil markets and, in turn, the U.S. economy?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?

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 [Boko Haram](#), and the situation in Nigeria as presented in this case more generally, threaten U.S. national security?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Nigeria [bilateral](#) relationship? How has it changed over time?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis and in the U.S. relationship with Nigeria generally?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram? How, if at all, might they help resolve, exacerbate, or otherwise shape the current situation?
- What is the range of attitudes in Congress on Boko Haram, the Nigerian security services, U.S.-Nigeria relations, and the [Leahy Amendment](#) in general?
- Why might the United States be reluctant to grant Nigeria's request for equipment? How is the Leahy Amendment relevant in this case?
- If the U.S. president decided to grant Nigeria's request, how would the White House need to work with Congress to modify or satisfy Leahy Amendment restrictions?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

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.
-
- 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

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 a shift away from the policy of the Obama administration, President Donald Trump increased [counterterrorism](#) assistance to Nigeria. Trump approved the sale of twelve Super Tucano aircraft. In January 2021, shortly before Trump left office, the Nigerian government further proposed purchasing [twelve heavy attack helicopters](#) along with munitions and accompanying defense systems. Although the U.S. Congress initially blocked the sale over human rights concerns, [President Joe Biden approved it](#) in April 2022.

In the years since 2017, the Nigerian security forces and military have continued to commit human rights violations in their counterinsurgency fight. These have included illegal executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and incommunicado detentions. In one of the worst abuses, reports surfaced in February 2020 of the Nigerian military burning down villages and forcibly displacing hundreds of people.

[Boko Haram](#) remained active. Starting in late 2018, instances of violence spiked. Boko Haram increasingly began attacking Nigerian state targets. These targets are primarily military and police personnel. Successful attacks on troops and military installations allowed the group to supply itself to carry out further attacks. There has also been a shift in tactics and a new role for women within the group. Boko Haram has deployed [more female suicide bombers](#) than any other [terrorist](#) group in history. In 2019 alone, Boko Haram's attacks forced [more than sixty thousand](#) Nigerians to flee to neighboring Cameroon and Chad.

In May 2021, multiple Nigerian news reports announced the death of Abubakar Shekau. Shekau was the leader of Boko Haram's main faction. In the months after the announcement, defections from Boko Haram multiplied. The group and various factions that have splintered off from it have continued to conduct attacks in Northern Nigeria.

In February 2023, Nigeria elected a new president, Bola Tinubu. Tinubu [received international praise](#) for some early economic reforms after taking office. However, Tinubu has also faced criticism over [failing to adopt human rights reforms](#) and allegations of corruption.

The Biden administration has stated its desire for closer U.S. ties with African countries. It has emphasized the importance of democracy and human rights to his administration. Apart from reversing some of Trump's immigration policies toward Nigeria, Biden has yet to adopt significant or comprehensive policy steps regarding security strategy in West Africa.

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

- [“Boko Haram in Nigeria Case Study,”](#) YouTube video, 4:27, posted by CFR Education, November 16, 2016.
- Claire Klobucista, [“Nigeria’s Battle With Boko Haram,”](#) CFR.org, August 8, 2018.
- [“Nigeria Security Tracker,”](#) CFR.org, July 1, 2023.
- [“Boko Haram and the Crisis in Nigeria, Explained,”](#) YouTube video, 2:41, posted by Vox, February 18, 2015.
- Farouk Chothia, [“Who Are Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists?”](#) BBC Africa, November 24, 2016.
- [“Nigeria,”](#) in *Amnesty International Report 2019: The State of the World’s Human Rights*.
- U.S. Department of State, [“Leahy Fact Sheet,”](#) last modified, March 9, 2018.
- Zack Beauchamp, [“The Crisis in Nigeria, in 11 Maps and Charts,”](#) Vox, May 13, 2014.
- Human Rights Watch, [“Nigeria: Events of 2019.”](#)
- Dionne Searcey, [“Nigeria Finds a National Crisis in Every Direction It Turns,”](#) *New York Times*, July 17, 2016.
- [“Trump Administration ‘to Sell Nigeria Planes’ for Boko Haram Fight,”](#) *BBC*, April 11, 2017.
- U.S. Department of State, [“U.S. Relations with Nigeria,”](#) last modified December 19, 2019.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

Additional Resources

- John Campbell, "[Mixed Results in Evaluation of Multinational Effort Against Boko Haram](#)," Council on Foreign Relations, July 16, 2020.
- John Campbell, "[Nigeria's Buhari Administration, the Chibok Girls, and the ICRC](#)," CFR.org, October 20, 2016.
- Helene Cooper and Dionne Searcey, "[U.S. Plans Sale of Warplanes to Nigeria for Fighting Boko Haram](#)," *New York Times*, April 11, 2017.
- Human Rights Watch, "[Nigeria: Northeast Children Robbed of Education; Boko Haram's Devastating Toll on Students, Teachers, Schools](#)," April 11, 2016.
- Ruth Maclean, "[82 Chibok schoolgirls freed in exchange for five Boko Haram leaders](#)," *The Guardian*, May 07, 2017.
- Dionne Searcey, "[Women, Children and Razor Wire: Inside a Compound for Boko Haram Families](#)," *New York Times*, October 10, 2016.
- Lai Mohammed, "[Nigeria's Difficult Path to Lasting Peace with Boko Haram](#)," *Al Jazeera*, May 10, 2018.
- "[Nigerian military jet 'mistakenly bombs refugee camp', killing more than 100 including 20 Red Cross volunteers](#)," *Telegraph*, January 17, 2017.
- Jacob Olidort, "[What is Salafism? How a Nonpolitical Ideology Became a Political Force](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, November 24, 2015.

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).

- 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.

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.

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.

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.

Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2017 (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 February, 2017. Radical Islamist movement [Boko Haram](#) is waging an [insurgency](#) in northeast Nigeria estimated to have killed at least twenty thousand people in recent years. The insurgency threatens the stability of Nigeria, a major oil producer and Africa's most populous country. Nigerian security forces have made some progress against Boko Haram, but humanitarian and media organizations have reported extensive human rights abuses by these forces, including the killing of civilians. Nigeria's president has requested that the United States sell heavy military equipment to the country. However, a U.S. law, called the [Leahy Amendment](#), prohibits military assistance to foreign militaries credibly accused of human rights abuses unless the foreign government takes action—something Nigeria's government has yet to do. National Security Council (NSC) members need to advise the president on whether to authorize the sale despite legal and human rights concerns.

Decision Point

Despite Nigeria's military abuses, in 2016, the United States considered selling 12 Super Tucano planes—light aircraft used for [surveillance](#)—to Nigeria. However, on January 17, 2017, the same day the Obama administration planned to notify Congress of the aircraft sale to Nigeria, the Nigerian air force accidentally bombed a [refugee](#) camp killing more than 100 people. As a result, in one of his last decisions as U.S. President, Obama stalled the sale of the aircraft to Nigeria. On February 15th, during a telephone call with President Buhari, President Donald Trump indicated that he would take another look at the proposed sale.

The National Security Council (NSC) is meeting to discuss the sale. NSC members need to decide whether Nigeria's economic and strategic importance to the United States overrides legal and ethical concerns about ongoing human rights abuses. Specifically, the NSC should decide whether to advise the new president to recommit to the sale of the aircraft and/or to consider other forms of military aid in the future. The NSC should also consider whether the prospect of a closer [bilateral](#) military relationship could incentivize Nigeria to investigate claims of human rights abuses and take necessary steps to end them.

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 threat [Boko Haram](#) poses to Nigeria, the surrounding region, and international peace and security.
- Students will consider whether to provide United States support to the Nigerian government in light of legal and ethical concerns about ongoing human rights violations.
- Students will evaluate options for providing U.S. authorization for heavy weaponry in a manner that adheres to the [Leahy Amendment](#).

Concepts and Issues

Concepts

- Human rights
- [Insurgency](#)
- Oil and other natural resources
- Terrorism and [counterterrorism](#)
- U.S. military assistance and sales

Issues

- U.S.-Nigeria relations
- [Leahy Amendment](#)
- Nigerian political and religious dynamics
- Security sector reform
- U.S. promotion of human rights, democratization, and the [rule of law](#)
- Regional security in West Africa

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.

Policymakers in Washington have usually seen Nigeria as the most important U.S. partner in Africa. Successive U.S. presidents have supported Nigeria's evolution toward democracy. This support comes not only because of the U.S. belief in democratic [governance](#) but also because of Nigeria's size, diversity, and potential to be a helpful model for other African countries. Democratic failure in Nigeria could be a setback to the development and maintenance of democratic [norms](#) that have facilitated cooperation on various issues among many African countries.

U.S. goals in Nigeria in this case included continued evolution toward democratic governance, [rule of law](#), and respect for human rights. Another U.S. priority was economic development, which would likely promote political stability. In addition, Washington wanted to fight the expansion of militant [terrorist](#) movements. The United States has traditionally not had much leverage over the Nigerian government because of Nigeria's size and oil wealth. Going into 2017, an economic crisis caused

by falling oil prices and the threat of [Boko Haram](#) could provide Washington with greater negotiating advantage.

The [Leahy Amendment](#) forbids the U.S. State and Defense Departments from providing military assistance to foreign militaries if the U.S. secretary of state or defense has credible information that those groups have committed severe human rights violations. Accordingly, three options were possible in responding to Buhari's request for U.S. authorization to acquire the Super Tucano planes:

NSC members could conclude that U.S. security interests mandate authorizing the sale or transfer of the weapons Buhari requests.

In this case, National Security Council (NSC) members would need to advise the president on how to either meet or set aside the Leahy Amendment requirements. If the president agreed to Buhari's request, Washington could press Abuja to set up a commission to investigate credible accusations of abuses by its security forces and take appropriate judicial action. This option would meet the Leahy Amendment's requirements. It could open the door to a more extensive [bilateral](#) military relationship including the sale of more advanced weapons in the future. Addressing human rights abuses by the security services could also diminish Boko Haram's appeal. But if Abuja declined to take action, it would become more difficult for the United States to provide Nigeria with weaponry. It would also limit Washington's ability to build a closer relationship with the country. A public U.S. commitment to provide the requested weaponry could also politically strengthen Buhari's hand with his critics and boost the Nigerian military's morale.

NSC members could conclude that it remains best for the United States to decline Buhari's request given that the Leahy requirements cannot be met and should not be set aside.

This option would be the preferred approach if NSC members feared that Nigerian security forces' using American equipment would lead to significant civilian casualties. Worse, poor management by Nigerian forces could allow the aircraft to fall into the hands of Boko Haram. Further, aircraft require trained pilots. Therefore, any sale of aircraft would likely also require the United States to provide long-term training assistance for Nigerian pilots. It would take a long time between the authorization of the transfer of the weapons and their use on the battlefield. NSC members could conclude that the risks of both giving the weapons to Nigeria and the possible delay in their actually being used outweigh the benefits of agreeing to Buhari's request.

NSC members could advise the president to refuse the sale of aircraft and other requested equipment but offer assistance to the Nigerian security forces and legal system, including courts and prisons.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the Nigerian military faced severe shortfalls in the low-tech military equipment necessary for fighting an asymmetric war. The Nigerian military needed more ammunition, rifles, transport, tents, and medical equipment. The United States could provide these items without triggering the requirements of the Leahy Amendment. This option could include training and low-tech military equipment. However, it would not include heavier equipment such as aircraft. This type of assistance would likely actually prove more successful than heavy weapons against Boko Haram. It would also be unlikely to provide the immediate political boost Buhari sought. However, if such assistance helped Nigeria make its military, police force, and courts more professional and efficient, this option could conceivably reduce human rights abuses and pave the way for the United States to approve future requests for heavier military equipment.

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 spice or 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.

1. A [coalition](#) of U.S., British, and Nigerian human rights organizations releases a report containing fresh evidence of widespread abuses by Nigerian security forces in their fight against [Boko Haram](#) and other insurgent groups. The report ascribes “hundreds, perhaps thousands, of previously unreported deaths” to Nigerian forces. It ignites a firestorm in the international press and on social media. President Buhari says he will not tolerate the abuses and pledges “a full, independent, and transparent investigation” of every charge. However, he also notes that “we are fighting against people who kill civilians, who kidnap and enslave women and children.” Privately, one of Buhari’s senior advisors conveys to the U.S. ambassador in Abuja that the president’s request for heavy military equipment still stands.
2. Only four days after the massive Boko Haram attack in Lagos, two more suicide bombings occur at a crowded commercial center in the city. The first bombing kills six and injures fifteen more. The second occurs twenty minutes later, when emergency personnel and civilians have begun to crowd the scene. Another thirty-two people perish, and some one hundred are injured. Boko Haram has not yet claimed responsibility for the blasts, though political leaders and observers widely assume it is responsible. At the presidential residence in Abuja, President Buhari pledges “to stop at nothing to protect all Nigerians from the scourge of terrorism.” In a conversation with the U.S. ambassador in Abuja,

one of Buhari's senior advisors argues that the attacks should ensure swift and favorable consideration of Nigeria's request for heavy military equipment.

3. Nigeria's attorney general, who also serves as minister of justice, announces that "several dozen" soldiers will be arrested in the coming days and tried on charges of human rights abuses and [extrajudicial](#) killings in the fight against Boko Haram. Reports from U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers in Nigeria, along with media reports, offer competing interpretations. Some believe the announcement is a major step toward accountability and discipline in the Nigerian security forces. Others believe nothing will come of the announcement, which they view as a transparent effort by President Buhari's administration to curry favor with the United States and other international partners. Following the speech, several senior Nigerian officials tell diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Abuja that they hope this move will allow the United States to consider President Buhari's request for heavy military equipment more favorably.

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 [Boko Haram](#)? Why is the group considered a threat to Nigerian, West African, and possibly U.S. security?
2. What is the [Leahy Amendment](#)? How should this affect the policy decision in this case?
3. What factors have shaped Nigerian politics? How have Nigerian politics evolved over time?
4. What are the main characteristics of Nigeria's economy? What is the role of oil in particular?
5. What are the major criticisms of the ways in which Nigeria has sought to fight Boko Haram?

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](#)