

Simulation from Human Rights & Inequality and Foreign Policy

Unrest in Bahrain in 2014 (NSC)

Set in August 2014. Political unrest in Bahrain has led to a government crackdown.

Case Overview

Set in August 2014. In the small island country of Bahrain, government and security forces have clashed with protestors seeking democratic reform. The ruling al-Khalifa family has responded to these protests with force and mass arrests. The most recent clashes between government forces and protestors are not the first but certainly the bloodiest. In February 2011, Bahraini activists, inspired by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, gathered in the capital to seek political reform. The fact that Bahrain's leaders are part of the Sunni minority and the demonstrators represent the Shiite majority gives the uprising a sectarian complexion, in addition to the broader social issues of disenfranchisement and limited economic opportunity. The U.S. government has decided to convene a National Security Council (NSC) meeting to consider whether and how to support political reform in Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, without further destabilizing the country or compromising U.S. interests or values.

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.

Departments and Agencies

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

Department of State

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

Department of Defense

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

Intelligence Community

The U.S. intelligence community consists of eighteen agencies and organizations, including the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) (CIA), [National Security Agency](#) (NSA), and [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI), which gather and analyze intelligence. Each of these agencies has its own mission; for example, the NSA focuses on signals intelligence (information gathered from communications and other electronic signals) and the [Defense Intelligence Agency](#) on military information. The [director of national intelligence](#) is the president's principal advisor on intelligence issues. They oversee this network of agencies with the aim of ensuring that they work together and deliver the best possible information to U.S. policymakers.

Department of the Treasury

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

Department of Homeland Security

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

Department of Justice

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

Case Notes

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

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

Instructions

How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play

The Issue

In the small island country of Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf (sometimes known as the Arabian Gulf), government and security forces have clashed with protesters seeking democratic reform. Bahrain's leaders belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, a minority in the country; the majority of Bahrainis are Shiite. Bahrain has a history of Sunni-Shiite tension. However, that tension is only one dimension of the problems that have unfolded in the country. Broader societal stresses also drive calls for reform. These issues include repression, disenfranchisement, and limited economic opportunity for the country's majority.

Bahraini activists, inspired by uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, gathered in the country's capital, Manama, in February 2011. They demanded reforms from the government. These reforms included a new constitution that would provide an elected parliament and independent courts. Also included in the reforms were the release of protesters arrested in police crackdowns as well as freedom of expression. Some opposition groups made more forceful calls for Bahrain to become a true [constitutional monarchy](#) and for an end to King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's rule. The ruling Al Khalifa family responded to these protests with force and mass arrests.

Bahrain has, for decades, been a strategically important partner of the United States. This is mainly because of its location as the base for the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#). U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf has helped ensure the free flow of oil from the Middle East. As a result, the United States has formed a close economic and military relationship with the kingdom. However, the unrest raised the question of whether the United States should support calls for democratic reform in Bahrain. However, the United States also had to consider if doing so risked damaging the U.S.-Bahrain relationship and threatened U.S. strategic interests in the country.

Decision Point—*Set in August 2014*

Three years after Bahrain's 2011 uprising, progress toward reform has stalled. In January 2014, the government suspended its "national dialogue" with opposition groups. The government blamed the opposition for the breakdown. Soon after, renewed unrest gripped the country. On February 14—the anniversary of the initial uprising—thousands of protesters calling for King Hamad's ouster gathered in Bahrain's capital, Manama. The protesters met stiff resistance from security forces. This resulted in several injuries and dozens of arrests. Outside the capital, a bomb struck a police bus in a Shiite village, killing one police officer. Three more officers were killed by another bomb weeks later. Although mainstream opposition groups denied any connection to the bombings and condemned the acts, the attacks only amplified an already severe crackdown by Bahrain's security forces, especially in predominantly Shiite areas. Activists, along with international human rights organizations, are pressuring the United States, one of Bahrain's principal economic and military partners, to respond.

In this context, the president has called a National Security Council (NSC) meeting to decide how to respond to the unrest. Specifically, the NSC will need to decide whether the United States should continue to support the government of Bahrain, which has proved to be a staunch U.S. ally, or support the protesters' demands—potentially at the expense of U.S. strategic interests. They may also decide to seek out some middle ground.

Background

Bahrain is a country about one-fifth the size of Rhode Island and has a population of [1.5 million](#). Most sources indicate that the Bahraini citizenry is about 70 percent Shiite. However, the government maintains that the actual proportion is smaller.

Bahrain has been ruled by the Al Khalifa family since the royal family's ancestors arrived from neighboring Qatar in 1783. Although the country has been widely perceived to be more open and progressive than its neighbors in the Gulf, the reality is complex. Bahrain's government has adopted policies aimed at supporting religious tolerance, bolstering public health care and schooling, and upholding women's rights, including the right to vote and run for office.

Despite these policies, Bahrain has long had a dismal human rights record marked by a lack of political accountability. Furthermore, Bahrain has a history of discriminatory and repressive policies toward the majority Shiite population. On several occasions since the 1970s, tensions in Bahrain have boiled over into widespread protests over government repression. These were met with violence from state security forces. The government has on occasion, promised limited democratic reforms to address protesters' concerns. However, these reforms were often merely cosmetic changes. The ruling family's power remained unchanged in reality.

Bahrain has, for decades, maintained a strategic relationship with the United States. The country became the site of a small U.S. naval presence following World War II. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States enlarged its presence in Bahrain by reestablishing and basing the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#) there. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration designated Bahrain a [major non-NATO ally](#). This status entailed certain military benefits for Bahrain. These benefits included

participation in military-related research and development and special financing for the purchase of U.S. military equipment. In 2004, the United States and Bahrain signed a [free trade agreement](#) that expanded commercial relations between the countries.

Renewed unrest in Bahrain began on February 14, 2011. On this day, government forces shot at and beat peaceful protesters. Inspired by the successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia in the previous months, the demonstrators, generally Shias but also Sunnis, believed the moment was opportune to demand a more democratic society. The government's attempts to quash the uprising proved counterproductive because its use of force hardened the opposition's call for an end to monarchy. On February 17, security forces raided a protest camp. This resulted in the killing of several protesters and injuring hundreds more. When protests intensified in March 2011, the ruling family appealed to its allied neighbors for help. In response, the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates dispatched two thousand troops to Manama to help the Bahraini government put down the protests and reestablish order.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates acted to support Bahrain for two reasons. First, as fellow nondemocratic monarchies, they feared that the same popular movements that brought down Tunisian and Egyptian dictators could spread and endanger their own holds on power. Second, they believed that the mostly Shiite uprising in Bahrain was being incited by Iran—a large, non-Arab, predominantly Shiite country and rival of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and their allies. The Bahraini government argued that Iran, which until 1970 claimed Bahrain as part of its territory, was attempting to undermine the monarchy. In February 2013, Bahraini officials arrested eight people taking part in anti-government protests and alleged that these individuals had links to Iran.

Following the initial uprising, King Hamad formed the [Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry](#) (BICI) to investigate the government crackdown that began in response to the February 14 protests. The commission's five-hundred-page report found evidence of excessive force and torture and concluded that Bahraini authorities had caused the deaths of protesters. The commission made twenty-six recommendations to the government to ensure that such a crackdown would not happen again. Bahrain and other states welcomed the report. However, critics expressed concern that its recommendations did not specifically address ways to resolve the underlying political crisis. Bahrain's government agreed to adhere to the report's recommendations but ultimately implemented only a [handful of them](#) [PDF].

In 2012, reports of government-supported raids on Shiite mosques and villages made achieving a political resolution to the crisis more difficult. An upsurge in violence took place in mid-2012, when the government proceeded with plans to host a Formula 1 race. Bahraini officials had previously used this type of event to showcase the country as modern and progressive. Opposition groups took advantage of the large contingent of international news agencies present for the racing event by staging demonstrations before and during the race. This sparked clashes with Bahraini authorities.

In the following years, reports of arbitrary detention and torture continued to surface. Bahraini authorities [arrested hundreds](#) of opposition members on charges of militancy, often conducting raids in largely Shiite communities. Bahraini courts frequently jailed [dissidents](#) or, in some cases, [revoked their citizenship](#).

Unrest continued to flare up throughout 2013. Renewed demonstrations frequently met a harsh police response. Several bomb attacks occurred over the course of the year, [killing three Bahraini police officers](#). Opposition groups condemned those attacks. Bahraini authorities accused Iran-linked [terrorist](#) groups of carrying them out. Although the government called for a renewed national dialogue at the beginning of the year, Bahrain's main opposition group later decided to withdraw from the talks after one of its ranking members was arrested on [charges of inciting terrorism](#). As the country approached the third anniversary of its initial uprising, simmering tensions threatened to boil over at any moment.

Role of the United States

For the United States, the uprising in Bahrain raised a conflict between U.S. interests and values. The Barack Obama administration had to balance the United States' moral and political values—which included promoting democratic values and respect for human rights—on the one hand, with its ongoing strategic concerns in the region on the other. U.S. operations to combat [terrorist](#) groups were ongoing in the region, U.S. forces had been in Afghanistan for more than a decade, and tensions

with Iran remained high. Safeguarding U.S. interests in the region often depended on cooperation with Arab governments, including in Bahrain.

Bahrain under the Al Khalifa family had long been a U.S. ally. It had helped ensure the free flow of oil from the Middle East to other parts of the world. It also hosted the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#), which has patrolled the Persian Gulf and helped deter U.S. adversaries such as Iran. Bahrain and the United States have also worked together closely to combat terrorism in the region. Moreover, the United States has enjoyed close commercial and economic relations with Bahrain.

Renewed instability in Bahrain threatened these strategic and economic interests. For example, increased U.S. pressure on the Bahraini government for democratic reforms could anger the ruling family, which could reduce U.S.-Bahrain cooperation in response. Intensified domestic opposition could weaken or topple the government. This could result in a power vacuum or an uncertain transition during which the United States would lack a reliable partner.

Yet there were also American values to consider. U.S. policymakers have often emphasized support for democracy and freedom as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. This made it difficult for Washington to ignore the Bahraini opposition groups' demands for a more just and equitable society in Bahrain. However, Bahrain was already considered relatively progressive by the standards of the Persian Gulf region—in the area of women's rights for example. Strong American pressure on the regime could cause instability that would endanger the freedoms that Bahrainis already enjoyed.

Seeking to balance its interests and values, the United States did not fully embrace the Bahraini demonstrators in 2011. The public U.S. response to the initial uprising in Bahrain was muted. Obama encouraged [open dialogue between the government and the opposition](#). However, he remained silent on the use of force against protestors and the deployment of Saudi and Emirati troops to help quell the uprising. Later in 2011, the United States [temporarily suspended a \\$53 million arms deal](#), pending the findings of Bahrain's investigation of the uprising. The deal went forward less than a year later. The Obama administration, however, maintained partial restrictions blocking the sale of equipment that could be used against protestors, such as tear gas.

The United States had no shortage of options in dealing with a crisis in Bahrain. The question was what combination of them would be most successful in this case. In general, the options fell into four main categories:

Preparation and Role-Play

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[Instructions](#)

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

Roles Overview

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

Roles

President

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

The president's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship? How does the United States typically interact with Bahrain, and how does this inform U.S. action in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?

Vice President

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

The vice president's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- How would the White House need to work with Congress to execute any of the proposed policy options in this case? How might varying congressional attitudes influence the U.S. response to the situation in Bahrain?
- How would various U.S. responses to the crisis affect the perception of America among the United States' allies? What about those who want to do the United States harm?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?

Secretary of Defense

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

The secretary of defense's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States? Specifically, what would be the costs of moving the U.S. [Fifth Fleet](#) from Bahrain?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- Does the current situation in Bahrain require consideration of U.S. military intervention? Why or why not? What conditions might make consideration of an intervention necessary?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?

Secretary of State

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

The secretary of state's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship? How does this inform U.S. action in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?

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 Bahrain as presented in this case threaten the U.S. economy?
- What is the importance of Bahrain for the U.S. and global economies? What are the possible economic effects of the current unrest?
- What economic tools could the United States use to advance its goals in Bahrain?
- What is the importance of the Persian Gulf region for the U.S. and global economies? What are the possible effects of continued unrest and potential U.S. intervention on trade and the flow of oil in the region?
- If the United States intervened militarily in Bahrain, what would be the financial costs and broader impact on the U.S. economy?

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 the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- Could the unrest in Bahrain affect global oil flows? What effect might this have on the price of oil in the United States?
- If the United States were to move the [Fifth Fleet](#) from Bahrain, or if its relationship with Bahrain changed dramatically, what impact might this have on the supply of oil to the United States?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

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

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- How has the Bahraini government used law enforcement to counter the opposition in recent years? Should the United States urge the monarchy to release any Bahraini opposition leaders and protesters currently being held in prison? What kind of legal backing, such as domestic legislation or UN Security Council resolutions, might be useful or
- necessary for any U.S. action toward Bahrain?
- Are there any options for mediation from international or regional organizations that would help the various parties resolve their dispute?

Secretary of Homeland Security

Created after September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) focuses on such issues as terrorism prevention, border security and immigration, disaster response, and cybersecurity. Agencies such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Secret Service, and the Transportation Security Administration are part of this department. The secretary must help the president and other National Security Council (NSC) members understand any risks to the United States and its citizens that may arise from the situation and possible policy responses.

The Secretary of Homeland Security's goals are to

- advise the president on the homeland security dimensions of crises and potential policy responses, including any threats or implications for U.S. border security; and
- ensure the implementation of steps to protect the country and manage any security risks arising from the issue under consideration.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What steps should the United States take to reduce the risk of harm to Americans stemming from the situation, whether in Bahrain itself, in the region, or in the United States?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- How would governments and nonstate actors hostile to the United States view various policy responses to the unrest in Bahrain? Would certain U.S. responses be likely to lead to attempted terrorist attacks or other threats to homeland security?

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

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

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

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What role can or should the United Nations and its component parts play in this dispute? Is this solely a domestic issue limited to Bahrain or is it a matter of international peace and security, and what difference does this make for potential UN involvement?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What actions aimed at reducing tensions and advancing possible resolutions of the dispute are available to the United States at the UN?
- What are the major characteristics of the United States' relationship with Bahrain? How important is this relationship to U.S. foreign policy goals?

Chief of Staff

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

The chief of staff's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?

- What role do the media and public opinion play in U.S. policy toward Bahrain? Should the administration work with Congress to find solutions to the dispute in Bahrain?
- What have been the effects of U.S. policies toward Bahrain thus far, and have these policies advanced or hindered U.S. goals?
- What are the most important factors for the president to consider when making a decision?
- How can the president best articulate his or her decision and communicate it to the American people and the world?

National Security Advisor

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

The national security advisor’s goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship? How, if at all, does the United States typically interact with Bahrain, and how does this inform U.S. action in this case?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- What are the most important factors for the president to consider when making a decision?

Director of National Intelligence

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

The director of national intelligence’s goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?

- What are the primary interests, motivations, and goals of the Bahraini monarchy and the opposition in this dispute?
- What is the nature of the Bahraini opposition? In particular, what are the short- and long-term intentions of the principal opposition groups?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?
- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship? How does the United States typically interact with Bahrain, and how does this inform U.S. action 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 the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States? Specifically, what would be the costs of moving the U.S. [Fifth Fleet](#) from Bahrain?
- Should the United States maintain, increase, or decrease its military forces in Bahrain and the Persian Gulf region? What message, if any, would this choice send to the Bahraini monarchy, opposition, and other relevant parties?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- Does the current situation in Bahrain require consideration of U.S. military intervention? Why or why not? What conditions might make consideration of an intervention necessary?

General Advisor to the President

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

The general advisor's goals are to

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

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten U.S. national security?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the United States?

- What would happen if the United States simply ignored the situation in Bahrain?
- What U.S. interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized? How should these various interests influence a U.S. response?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?
- What is the nature of the U.S.-Bahrain relationship? How, if at all, does the United States typically interact with Bahrain, and how does this inform U.S. action in this case?

Guide to the Memorandum

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

What is a memorandum?

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

Guide to the Role-Play

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

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

Wrap-up

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

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

[Instructions](#)

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

The Debrief

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

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

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

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

What Actually Happened

Despite continuing tension between government forces and opposition in Bahrain, the United States has largely maintained close relations with Bahrain and has put limited pressure on the government toward reform. The Obama administration continued to criticize Bahrain's repressive measures and called for restraint and dialogue between the government and opposition groups. However, it stopped short of measures that would put strong pressure on the government.

In the following years, the United States and Bahrain continued to fortify their military and economic relationship. The Donald Trump administration de-emphasized human rights issues in Bahrain as part of a broad strategy to fight extremism and counter Iranian influence in the Middle East. Following the discovery of a large oil and gas reserve in April 2018, Bahrain approached major oil companies for contracts to develop oil fields. Bahrain expressed a preference for U.S. companies due to the strength of existing U.S.-Bahrain ties. Upon taking office in 2021, President Joe Biden once again emphasized the importance of democracy and human rights to his administration's foreign policy. However, Biden has continued to pursue and [even deepen](#) security cooperation with Persian Gulf states.

As a result of its continued cooperation with Bahrain, the United States has received considerable support from the country on several strategic and diplomatic objectives. These have included conducting [counterterrorism](#) operations, managing ongoing tensions with Iran in the Persian Gulf, and easing Arab-Israeli tensions.

Still, ongoing tension between the government and the opposition continues to bring U.S. interests into conflict with U.S. values. Repression and violence in Bahrain [have intensified](#), including the arrest and jailing of activists, [extrajudicial](#) killings, and revocations of citizenship. The United Nations, along with human rights groups, has [heavily criticized](#) the country's practices and called for Bahrain to observe international human rights laws. So far, international pressure on Bahrain to improve its treatment of citizens has been limited, and the country has faced few consequences for its continued violation of human rights.

The United States has faced sharp criticism over its leniency toward Bahrain's leaders despite the country's continued lack of progress toward meaningful reform. Human rights groups, Bahraini opposition members, and [U.S. lawmakers](#) have all made frequent calls for the White House to push more forcefully for Human Rights in Bahrain. Some critics [have also argued](#) that the U.S. government's handling of the situation has been counterproductive. Worsening repression and [continued unrest](#) on the island, they argue, indicates that U.S. policy has failed to support stability in Bahrain. Furthermore, it could potentially even undermine U.S. efforts to reduce violent extremism in the region.

At the same time, deteriorating relations with Iran and ongoing counterterrorism operations in the region have reaffirmed the strategic logic that drove Washington to maintain a productive relationship with Manama in the first place. Heightened tensions in the Persian Gulf especially serve to underscore the continued relevance of the [Fifth Fleet](#)'s presence. Even if the United States could promote greater stability by pushing harder for reforms, the consequences of compromising U.S. military readiness, let alone losing the cooperation of a regional ally, could be severe.

Reflecting on the Experience

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

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

Written Reflection

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

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Essential Resources

- [“Unrest in Bahrain Case Study | Model Diplomacy,”](#) YouTube, 2:42, posted by CFR Education, November 14, 2016.
- [“What are Economic Sanctions?”](#) CFR Education, May 12, 2023.
- Kelly McEvers, [“Bahrain: The Revolution that Wasn’t,”](#) NPR, January 5, 2012.
- Doug Palmer, Christopher Wilson, and Paul Simao, [“U.S. Requests Talks With Bahrain Over 2011 Labor Crackdown,”](#) *Reuters*, May 7, 2013.
- [“Factbox: U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, Based in Bahrain,”](#) *Reuters*, February 17, 2011.
- Bilal Y. Saab, [“Relocating the Fifth Fleet?”](#) *American Interest*, August 22, 2018.
- Elliott Abrams, [“Bahrain: ‘Insulting a Public Institution’ Means Prison,”](#) CFR.org, January 21, 2015.
- Alison Meuse, [“Human Rights Activists Warn of Worsening Situation in Bahrain,”](#) NPR, June 6, 2017.
- [“Bahrain Human Rights Deteriorate as World Looks Away: Activists,”](#) *Reuters*, January 25, 2018.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

Additional Resources

- [Amnesty International, “Bahrain: Reform Shelved, Repression Unleashed,”](#) November 2012.
- Kelly McEvers, [“The Crackdown,”](#) *Washington Monthly*, March/April 2012.
- Tim Arango, [“Shiites in Iraq Support Bahrain’s Protestors,”](#) *New York Times*, April 1, 2011.
- Ted Regencia and Alia Chughtai, [“What’s at Stake if Trading at Strait of Hormuz is Disrupted?”](#) *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2018.
- [“Oil’s Trouble Spots,”](#) CFR.org, January 20, 2012.
- Chris Johnston and agencies, [“Britain to Build First Permanent Middle East Military Base in Four Decades,”](#) *Guardian*, December 6, 2014.
- Reza Aslan, [“Bahrain’s Fake Sectarian War,”](#) *Foreign Affairs*, June 30, 2013.

How to Conduct Research and Use Sources

Research and Preparation

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

and anticipate and prepare for debates in the role-play.

- Consider what questions or challenges the president or other NSC members might raise regarding the options you propose and have responses ready.

Sources

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

How to Write a Position Memo

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

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

below).

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

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

How to Write a Presidential Directive

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

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

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

How to Prepare for Role-Play

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

Role-play Guidelines

1. Stay in your role at all times. (Keep in mind that your role refers to the perspective and duties of the agency or department you represent, and not the specific person currently holding office of the role.)
2. Follow the general protocol for speaking.
 1. Signaling to Speak
 1. The National Security Advisor (NSA) will administer the meeting and should decide on a speaking order. Wait to be called on by the NSA.
 2. If you would like to speak out of turn, signal to the NSA, perhaps by raising a hand or a placard, and wait until the NSA calls on you.
 2. Form of Speech

1. All NSC members (like the president in the following example) can be addressed as Mr./Madam/Mx. President or simply President [last name]. Before you begin the role-play, share which title you would like to use, and make sure to respect the title your fellow NSC members choose to use as well.
 2. Do not exceed predetermined time limits. If you exceed these limits, the NSA will cut you off.
 3. Frame your comments with a purpose and stay on topic. Remember that you must advise the president so that they can reach a decision on a precise policy question.
3. Listening
1. Take notes while others are speaking.
 2. Refrain from whispering or conducting side conversations.
 3. Applause and booing are not appropriate. Your words will be the most effective tool to indicate agreement or disagreement.

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.

Unrest in Bahrain in 2014 (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 August 2014. In the small island country of Bahrain, government and security forces have clashed with protestors seeking democratic reform. The ruling [al-Khalifa](#) family has responded to these protests with force and mass arrests. The most recent clashes between government forces and protestors are not the first but certainly the bloodiest. In February 2011, Bahraini activists, inspired by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, gathered in the capital to seek political reform. The fact that Bahrain's leaders are part of the Sunni minority and the demonstrators represent the Shiite majority gives the uprising a [sectarian](#) complexion, in addition to the broader social issues of disenfranchisement and limited economic opportunity. The U.S. government has decided to convene a National Security Council (NSC) meeting to consider whether and how to support political reform in Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#), without further destabilizing the country or compromising U.S. interests or values.

Decision Point

Three years after Bahrain's 2011 uprising, progress toward reform has stalled. In January 2014, the government suspended its "national dialogue" with opposition groups. The government blamed the opposition for the breakdown. Soon after, renewed unrest gripped the country. On February 14—the anniversary of the initial uprising—thousands of protestors calling for King Hamad's ouster gathered in Bahrain's capital, Manama. The protestors met stiff resistance from security forces. This resulted in several injuries and dozens of arrests. Outside the capital, a bomb struck a police bus in a Shiite village, killing one police officer. Three more officers were killed by another bomb weeks later. Although mainstream opposition groups denied any connection to the bombings and condemned the acts, the attacks only amplified an already severe crackdown by Bahrain's security forces, especially in predominantly Shiite areas. Activists, along with international human rights organizations, are pressuring the United States, one of Bahrain's principal economic and military partners, to respond.

In this context, the president has called a National Security Council (NSC) meeting to decide how to respond to the unrest. Specifically, the NSC will need to decide whether the United States should continue to support the government of Bahrain, which has proved to be a staunch U.S. ally, or support the protestors' demands—potentially at the expense of U.S. strategic interests. They may also decide to seek out some middle ground.

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 potential consequences of instability in Bahrain for the interests of the United States in the Persian Gulf.
- Students will consider how the United States should balance its strategic interests in the Middle East while also upholding its values.
- Students will evaluate the policy options available to the United States for dealing with a crisis in Bahrain.

Concepts and Issues

Concepts

- Interests versus values
- Sectarianism
- Political reform
- [Alliances](#)
- Dispute resolution

Issues

- Free flow of energy resources in the Middle East
- U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement
- U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region
- U.S. support for democratic [governance](#)

Policy Options: Educator's Guide

This section presents context, potential benefits and drawbacks, and other information about the policy options outlined in the case. You can use this information several ways:

1. To develop questions or topics (beyond those in the role sheets) for students to consider during in-class discussion and in their research
2. To assist in grading policy and position memos
3. To evaluate student performance during the role-play
4. To develop prompts to steer the role-play
5. To assign students specific policy options to defend or arguments to make during the role-play
6. To make the simulation less challenging by providing this material to your students

The instability in Bahrain has far-reaching implications for both the United States and the Persian Gulf. Throughout the unrest in Bahrain, the United States has continued to advocate for dialogue between the opposition and government loyalists.

Ultimately, both U.S. interests and values are at stake.

Bahrain under the Al Khalifa family has long been a U.S. ally. It helps ensure the free flow of energy resources from the Middle East to other parts of the world, deters U.S. adversaries such as Iran, and hosts the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#), which patrols the surrounding waters, including the Strait of Hormuz. Bahrain and the United States also work together closely on defense and [counterterrorism](#) issues. Moreover, the United States enjoys close commercial and economic relations with Bahrain, reinforced by a [bilateral](#) free trade agreement.

In recent years, escalating tensions between the United States and Iran have underscored Bahrain's strategic importance to U.S. interests. In April 2019, Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz after President Trump renewed [sanctions](#) that had been waived under the Iran nuclear deal. That summer, Iranian forces and proxies conducted a series of attacks on commercial tankers and oil facilities in the Strait of Hormuz and Saudi Arabia. Escalating tensions prompted the United States to bolster its military presence in the Middle East, including by deploying an aircraft carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf. Throughout 2019 and 2020, tensions have remained high in the Persian Gulf, with Iranian forces harassing U.S. naval ships and boarding oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Instability in Bahrain could endanger these strategic and economic interests. For example, increased U.S. pressure on the Bahraini government for democratic reforms could anger the ruling family, which could reduce bilateral cooperation in response. Intensified domestic opposition could weaken or topple the government, resulting in a power vacuum or an uncertain transition during which the United States would lack a reliable partner.

A new crackdown by the authorities could spark an international backlash, forcing the United States to distance itself from the Bahraini government. In such a case, American values need to be considered. Support for democracy and freedom has traditionally been a principal component of U.S. foreign policy; therefore, the United States cannot simply ignore the Shiite population's demands for a more just and equitable society in Bahrain. However, by the standards of the Persian Gulf, Bahrain is considered to be relatively progressive—for example, with respect to women's rights. Strong U.S. pressure on the regime could cause instability that would endanger the few freedoms that Bahrainis enjoy.

Seeking to balance its interests and values, the United States has not fully embraced the Bahraini demonstrators. In particular, it has stopped short of supporting the opposition's demand for an end to the Al Khalifa family's rule. The core question is whether the United States should continue to stand behind the Al Khalifa family despite its nondemocratic practices or more firmly back the aspirations of Bahrain's Shiite majority. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton summed up the U.S. predicament in Bahrain when she declared, "As a country with many complex interests, we'll always have to walk and chew gum at the same time. That is our challenge in a country like Bahrain, which has been America's close friend and partner for decades. And yet, President Obama and I have been frank, in public and in private, that mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain's citizens and will not make legitimate calls for reform go away."

The United States has numerous options for dealing with a crisis in Bahrain. The question is what combination of them would be most successful in this case. The United States should consider the following options:

- move the Fifth Fleet to Kuwait or Qatar, or threaten to do so unless the Bahraini government implements certain reforms
- pressure the Bahraini government with a cessation of all arms and military assistance, or make military assistance conditional upon political progress
- threaten to suspend the U.S.-Bahrain free trade agreement over Bahrain's violation of certain parts of the agreement
- target foreign aid toward organizations deemed favorable to U.S. interests, such as specific opposition groups or reformers within the monarchy
- publicly criticize the Bahraini government
- articulate U.S. concern for the situation in Bahrain in an international forum such as the United Nations in order to highlight the issue and call on other countries to put pressure on Bahrain
- recognize the strategic benefits of the U.S. relationship with the Al Khalifa regime and offer full U.S. support to the ruling family

Considerations

To weigh the policy options, NSC members will need to consider the effects of Bahrain's unrest—and any U.S. policy responses—on U.S. interests and values. The situation itself poses both long-term and potentially immediate challenges to the United States. The principal chronic challenge is to values. The United States has for decades maintained a close relationship with Bahrain despite its nondemocratic government. Bahrain is hardly the only such country. The United States also partners closely with other autocratic states in the Middle East, including, prominently, neighboring Saudi Arabia. These relationships subject the United States to accusations of hypocrisy surrounding its global efforts to promote democracy and human rights as core American ideals. Still, successive U.S. administrations have believed that maintaining close ties with autocratic Arab states serves U.S. strategic interests. To various extents, policymakers have sought to advance human rights and reforms in the region. But they have tended to do so within the framework of friendly relations and have not generally punished or threatened Arab governments in an attempt to advance U.S. values.

NSC members could recommend that the United States more forcefully push Bahraini leaders to reform, making it more uncomfortable for the [al-Khalifa](#) family to avoid meaningful steps. If successful, this could constitute an appealing middle ground that addresses opposition grievances, thereby increasing the country's long-term stability, while leaving in place a government broadly favorable to U.S. interests. However, excessive pressure from Washington could anger the monarchy, causing it to reduce bilateral cooperation or retaliate diplomatically, such as when it declared senior U.S. official Tom Malinowski *persona non grata* in 2014. On the other hand, if the United States excludes democracy and human rights completely from its agenda with Bahrain, leaders in Manama could understand the exclusion as permission to crack down against the opposition and harden their stance against reform. A new crackdown might spark an international backlash, forcing the United States to distance itself from the Bahraini government. In addition, Bahrain is already considered relatively progressive by the standards of the Persian Gulf region, for example in the area of women's rights. Retrenchment by the monarchy could endanger what rights and freedoms Bahrainis already enjoy. The overall question is what if any U.S. response to growing tension and unrest could increase Bahrain's stability, thereby serving U.S. interests, while advancing U.S. values.

Acute challenges to U.S. interests could also arise, depending on how the situation in Bahrain evolves. Should a Shia-led uprising succeed in ousting Bahrain's rulers or transforming the country into a [constitutional monarchy](#) in which elected leaders hold sway, Bahrain's strategic posture could change dramatically. Under such conditions, Bahrain's new leaders might be aligned with Iran, a country that poses significant challenges to U.S. interests. These leaders, also believing that the United States gave them too little support when they struggled against the monarchy, could turn against Washington. In the most extreme case, such a shift could cause Bahrain to evict the U.S. military and end cooperation on counterterrorism and other issues, depriving the United States of a long-standing partner and a naval foothold in the Persian Gulf. Depending on the speed and scope of such a change, the United States might be left scrambling to protect its military assets in Bahrain and its strategic and economic interests in the Middle East. Even short of this scenario, intensified opposition activity that weakened or toppled the government could produce a power vacuum in which the United States lacks a reliable partner.

On the other hand, withdrawing U.S. support for Bahrain's government in the heat of an uprising could also have adverse consequences. The monarchy could survive and reconsolidate its position. Should leaders believe the United States had abandoned them, they could reduce or even end their cooperation with Washington.

These possibilities raise the question of whether and how the United States should try to get on the right side of history when popular movements seek to overthrow nondemocratic U.S. allies. A similar question arose in 2011, when President Barack Obama called for the president of Egypt at the time, Hosni Mubarak, to leave office. Mubarak, a longtime autocratic leader and U.S. ally, was facing mass protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square that erupted as part of a wave of uprisings across the Arab world. (The protests succeeded in chasing Mubarak from office.) Although applauded by advocates of human rights and democratic accountability, Obama's policy shift sparked concern in remaining Arab autocracies, where rulers worried that their friends in Washington might similarly abandon them should their citizens rise up. If reinforced by U.S. policy toward Bahrain, this sentiment could make Arab governments less willing to cooperate on U.S. objectives. Conversely, visible steps to intensify the U.S. commitment to Bahrain's current rulers may provide reassurance. This could serve the valuable purpose of increasing Arab cooperation with the United States on a range of vexing issues in the Middle East, such as terrorism, the Islamic State group, and the threats posed by Iran.

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. The U.S. Embassy in Manama reports that King Hamad bin Isa [al-Khalifa](#) has entered a hospital with a sudden and severe illness. Some unconfirmed reports indicate that the king may in fact have died. The reports set off intense speculation about a struggle for succession within the ruling family. U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers expect opposition leaders to try to take advantage of the crisis and press their demands.
2. King Hamad announces plans for a new national dialogue aimed at agreeing on sweeping political reforms. He indicates a willingness to fully reconsider the powers of the monarchy, the parliament, and other institutions, saying that “no idea should be off the table.” He specifically mentions that the [al-Wefaq](#) political society has agreed to participate, and al-Wefaq leaders quickly confirm this. Immediate news reports express hope for progress, but also concerns that the dialogue could intensify divisions within the monarchy and within the opposition.
3. In a blistering speech, a prominent Iranian cleric castigates the Bahraini monarchy for what he calls its “long-standing subjugation and cold-blooded murder of our Shia brothers and sisters.” According to Iranian media, the cleric is speaking with the support of Iran’s senior leadership. He calls for the Iranian government to take action in support of Bahraini Shias, using force if necessary. Bahraini leaders quickly condemn the speech and raise the alert status of their

security forces. The principal Bahraini opposition figures do not immediately react.

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

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

Case Assessment

1. What is the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case, and how does it threaten U.S. national security?
2. Why are the Bahraini activists dissatisfied with the [al-Khalifa](#) regime and what are their demands?
3. How has the Bahraini government responded to popular unrest? What have been the consequences of the government's actions?
4. What are the United States' interests in Bahrain? How might pursuing these interests conflict with U.S. values?

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](#)