



# **NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

## **Committee Guide**

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**\*WARNING\***

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### **Introduction**

The National Security Council is a small but powerful agency that advises the president on national security matters and foreign policy questions. Top government officials in diplomacy, intelligence, and defense come together on the NSC to protect America's interests around the world. As a national security official, you will make high-stakes decisions regarding American policy toward foreign states, terrorist groups, and other potential security threats. You will have direct and personal access to the President of the United States.

The role of the NSC is as far-reaching and flexible as its membership, and adjusts to the changing climates of both America and the world. Assembling the ideas and expertise of the federal agencies concerned with national security, the Council recommends possible courses of action to the President, who is ultimately responsible for setting foreign policy goals and making final decisions dealing with national security threats.

### **Inside the NSC**

Established under the National Security Act of 1947, the Council serves as the primary body under the Office of the President concerned with matters of national security. Since its inception, the Council has been at the center of the President's national security coordination system, changing frequently to conform to the needs and inclinations of each succeeding chief executive. The structure and function of the NSC has depended in no small degree upon the interpersonal chemistry between the President and his principal advisors and department heads.

By law, the Council is composed of the President, the Vice-President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State. These members are advised and assisted by the Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President may invite other Administration officials as the situation requires it. The NSC and its staff of analysts and technicians are headed by the National Security Advisor.

Although the NSC is an important advisory body, it has no power to enact law. The agency's focus lies in formulating both short- and long-term perspectives on US foreign policy

and presenting these visions to the President. Current President George W. Bush is very likely to follow the Council's recommendations.

## **Defining National Security**

At its most basic level, national security means protecting the interests of the United States: the safety of its citizens, their property, and their ideals. Few deny that the protecting the lives of American citizens is a critical national security goal, though some might question whether protecting citizens' property should be considered a national security issue. Whether military force should be used toward economic ends is a moral issue about which you should come to your own conclusion, but ensuring American commercial interests and macroeconomic stability has traditionally been a goal of security policy.

Defending ideals may seem like an equally unfamiliar security goal, but since the beginning of recorded history, ideals have influenced security decisions. President Bush has re-focused American national security strategy toward promoting democracy, arguing both that democratic principles are just and that democracies are more likely to be peaceful and less likely to support terrorism. Be prepared to assess the benefits of democratic regimes and the potential dangers of actively promoting liberal democratic ideals

The NSC confronts a variety of threats to American national security, from the military posture of foreign states, to non-state terrorist actors, to the spread of disease and environmental disasters. Traditionally, national security officials have focused on confronting direct military threats, but in the years since the end of the Cold War, many strategists have suggested that future dangers will come not from other developed states but from non-state actors (terrorist groups) and social and political instability in other countries.

Destabilizing factors such as environmental degradation might not seem like critical national security issues, but as one U.S. official explained, "The Defense Intelligence Agency recently identified the ecological deterioration of Lake Victoria as a cause of potential instability in East Africa. Thirty million people... [are] at risk of having their livelihoods and their well being compromised by the threat to this huge lake...If the root causes of the problem go unaddressed, our military forces may be called upon to deal with the consequences a few years hence."

The threats of the modern age require that you take a holistic view of national security while still maintaining priorities. Islamic extremist terrorism is a more immediate threat than the spread of AIDS, requiring direct and urgent action. Nevertheless, it is critical that you not lose sight of the long-term issues when dealing with the time-pressured, high-stakes crises that are bound to occur.

## **NSC Procedure**

You have received three briefings on pressing security issues. Discussion in the NSC will begin by focusing on these issues with the goal of developing a comprehensive policy on the national security issue at hand. The Council will formulate a single policy recommendation to submit to the President.

NSC sessions are informal, chaired by the National Security Advisor. Compromise is crucial to the resolution of any problem; only by balancing all interests can the NSC succeed. Each member will have a unique perspective—and unique information—to contribute to the debate. The President seeks solutions that take each of America’s many interests into account.

Discussion will be interrupted and switch course as the NSC learns of breaking developments. The Council will find NSC staff knowledgeable and helpful; in addition, each member has a staff that can advise him on questions relating to his specific role. For example, the Chief of Naval Operations can expect that her staff will be experts on naval issues. NSC members should expect communication from their agency’s personnel and contacts in Washington and abroad. These messages often convey the most up-to-date developments and remind members of their commitments and priorities.

Additionally, the Council should expect to address the president and the press several times daily. The NSC must appear unified and strong in its decisions; opponents will seize upon perceived internal strife.

When the president visits, the Council must concisely present its plan and effectively advocate for its approval. International developments will require immediate action—lives may hang in the balance. Belligerent foreign officials will come to the Council and make demands or seek immediate justification for American actions. Members must think and speak on their feet, relying on the strength of the Council’s analysis to support their positions.

The NSC must guard its secrets. The Council’s discussions are of the highest secrecy and take place behind closed doors. Leaks to the press jeopardize American lives and the success of the President’s policy. Foreign countries will become aware of any material printed in the newspapers; unfavorable articles may result in public opposition to even the most well thought-out actions. Public disapproval will likely lead the president to change course. Spies have appeared on the NSC in the past.

## **Understanding Your Role**

Although all U.S. national security officials have America’s best interests in mind, ‘America’s interests’ are themselves up for debate. Each member approaches NSC topics from a different understanding of national security; members represent, more precisely, America’s interests according to their perspective, which is shaped by the department they head. To fully grasp the complexities of national security issues, all interests must be strongly represented and accounted for. While the Council must compromise, you should remain loyal to their agency’s central priorities

For example, significant differences in perspective will exist between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of State. State Department officials are more likely to seek multilateral, negotiated solutions, whereas military officials have greater trust in the application of military force.

It is expected that the manner in which you approach national security issues will be informed by the perspective of the agency you head or the bureaucratic constituency that you represent. The Press Secretary should be especially concerned with how the Council will ‘spin’ its actions to the media, and the Director of Central Intelligence should seek to ensure that the safety of his agents is not compromised by the Council’s decisions.

Your understanding of history and current events is invaluable and will certainly shape your decisions. Advocate for solutions that have worked in the past and cite previous examples in the Council's discussion. When confronted with difficult issues, use these tools to unpack the situation and chart a course forward.

## **The National Security Community**

A few agencies form the core of America's national security community and they are consulted regarding nearly every security issue. Members should be acquainted with each of these major departments.

### *State Department*

The State Department bears primary responsibility for foreign policy. Through its embassies and consulates, the State Department tracks and evaluates foreign policy and conducts day-to-day diplomacy abroad.

Sensitive to international opinion, the State Department seeks to minimize friction with other nations and to cultivate long-term US diplomatic interests. The department often favors peaceful, negotiated settlements and cooperative, diplomatic discussions among nations. When recommending the deployment of force, however, the Department may have fewer reservations than the Secretary of Defense or the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both of whom directly face criticism when military intervention is ineffective.

### *The Intelligence Community*

The Intelligence Community is currently at an uncertain position: its institutional organization has been shaken up by the post-9/11 intelligence reforms, but a new modus operandi has not yet been reached. Each of the 16 organizationally distinct intelligence services were formerly coordinated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); but as a result of the reforms, the Director of National Intelligence is now the statutory coordinator, though the post has little budgetary control and thus little bureaucratic influence.

Compounding the confusion, several of the most influential intelligence services, including the National Security Agency (NSA), are controlled directly by the Secretary of Defense, who has staunchly defended his prerogatives. Thus, the intelligence community is currently divided, bereft of decisive leadership, and in a questionable state of effectiveness. It is unclear whether the Intelligence Community has improved in effectiveness since September 10<sup>th</sup>.

Members of the Intelligence Community hold a swing vote on the NSC. They seek to gather as much information as possible before making decisions. They also prioritize the protection of American spies and are often sensitive to foreign infiltration and distrustful of other nations. Intelligence officials often decide whether the NSC will pursue military or diplomatic resolutions, depending on the issues at hand.

### *Department of Defense*

The Department of Defense is headed by civilians responsible for the preparedness and deployment of the American military. The department oversees the administration and opera-

tion of the United States Armed Forces and plans military strategy worldwide. Its officials emphasize the threat and use of military force in foreign relations.

Defense Department officials analyze the implications of NSC decisions for American military strength and prestige around the world and for the condition of the Armed Forces themselves. They may be reluctant to use the military out of concern for its men, material, and reputation. They are also sensitive to the Armed Forces' budget. Accommodating budgetary constraints and avoiding costly initiatives are priorities that set the civilian officials in the Department of Defense apart from their military colleagues in the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

#### *Joint Chiefs of Staff*

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) are the top officers of the United States Armed Forces. Members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff tend to see the military as subject only to partial and occasional control and oversight by the civilian officials from the Defense Department.

As highly successful career military officers with personal preferences for the military approach and personal stakes in the success of their respective branches of the Armed Forces, they represent the perspective of the military more reliably than officials in the Department of Defense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have great confidence in the ability of the United States military—and greater fear of damage to U.S. forces in risky or unusual situations.

#### *Department of Homeland Security*

Created in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the Department of Homeland Security is a conglomeration of 22 previously unaffiliated agencies. From customs, to the Secret Service, to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which responds both to natural disasters and potential attacks, DHS has a wide mandate, diverse elements, and an ambivalent track record.

Each of the responsibilities of DHS is an important national security function in its own right, yet managing each of these, and finding an appropriate balance, has been difficult. The initial bureaucratic problems caused by merging so many diffuse agencies into one department have not yet been overcome. The Department's relationship with the broader national security community is still being worked out, and the Secretary often approaches NSC issues with a sense of deep institutionalized ambivalence.

#### *White House Officials*

As advisors close to the president, the Press Secretary, Chief of Staff, and other White House officials have an important voice in the decision-making process. Especially concerned with the President's image and public approval, these officials seek to balance national security goals with the larger issue of the President's ability to govern.

Unity and consistency are key goals as these figures prod the Council to consider the President's political standing while formulating policy. White House officials are intimately aware that factors such as the President's relationship with Congress, public approval, and media strategy are as important to effective governance as the actual policy; at least, that is the perspective they often glean from their domestic political experience.

## Preparation to Assume Your Role

To prepare for your seat on the council, you will submit short written statements (called a Policy Review Memorandum), on each of the issue briefings you received. Each PRM consists of three parts: research, goals, and policy recommendation.

**Research:** on each of the issues on which you received a briefing, find three articles or websites relating to it. In a short paragraph (four or five sentences), summarize each article/website. (Reminder: Three article summaries *per* issue.)

**Goals and Policy Recommendation:** After reading the articles and your briefing, as well as doing some additional research, submit a short policy proposal on each issue. Make sure that your policy proposal clearly states and achieves President Bush's goals.

**Submission:** Email your article summaries and policy proposals to the National Security Advisor, Ms. Laura Dean (ldean@fas.harvard.edu)

In your PRM, concentrate on broad strategy and do not focus on specifics. We are not interested in which aircraft carriers you want to use; we are interested in whether the navy will be used to seize North Korean ships which may be exporting nuclear materials. All NSC members will be writing on each of the four topics and working from the same issue briefings—do not just summarize the details in the briefings when creating your memorandums.

*Sample PRM:*

**Article Summary 1:** The first article I read discussed President Bush's policy in Iraq. Because of high levels of violence, President Bush wants to send an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq, to provide security in Baghdad and Anbar province. He also appointed a new military commander in Iraq, General Petraeus, who has experience fighting insurgencies. Democrats criticized the President's plan for putting more American troops in danger, and argued that the U.S. should be withdrawing troops rather than adding more. Still, Democrats in Congress were unsure whether they would seek to cut off funding for military forces in Iraq.

[Reminder: each of your PRMs will include 3 article summaries.]

**Goals and Policy Proposal:** The President's goals in Iraq are to help stabilize their democratic government, provide security, and fight terrorism. To achieve these goals, the U.S. should:

- Refocus on providing security to Baghdad because 20% of the Iraqi population lives there and because it is the political center of the country.
- Withdraw troops from areas in the north and south that are relatively stable
- Cut a deal with Iran so that they stop supporting militant groups.
- Continue training Iraqi forces.

*Researching Your Memoranda*

In order to formulate your opinions as you research your PRMs, seek information directly from the department or agency that you represent. Check out your agency's website. Follow current events, either through newspapers or journals like *Foreign Affairs*. Furthermore, it

is imperative that you become familiar with President Bush's National Security Strategy, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

Email the National Security Advisor (NSA), with questions. After we receive your PRMs, we will reply with advice on how you can further sharpen your understanding of the issues. Laura Dean can be reached at [ldean@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ldean@fas.harvard.edu).

## **Conclusion**

The President of the United States charges you, members of the National Security Council, with the Defense of the United States: no task is so noble, so intricate, or so imperative. You will serve as a vital advisory resource for the President, bringing together the ideas and research of all federal departments and agencies concerned with national security, foreign policy, and American's national interests abroad. Proceedings will be cloaked in secrecy, for your topics of discussion are of the most immediate and monumental nature.